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JUST AS THE STABLE-CLOCK STRUCK THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT, A FIGURE ROSE, AND STOOD AT MY SIDE.

THE MISTRESS OF THE MANOR.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"AND I am mistress and owner of all this!" exclaimed Maude Raymond, as she turned and slowly surveyed the sight before her. "Yes! Mistress and owner of this grand old Manor House! A girl to be envied by all, indeed; at least, so my numerous friends and acquaintances tell me. But—I think differently. Ah, me! Why did poor dear papa add that one condition? Why is it that I shall never look upon this venerable old pile—my ancestral home—with aught but pride alone? I can imagine regarding it with proud feelings surging in my heart, but I can never be happy here!"

The girl shivered, while a look of disgust arose

quickly over her fair face as she walked forward a few paces; then again stopped at a small rustic bridge, spanning a pretty silvery stream.

It was a glorious day. The Manor House, the home of Maude Raymond's ancestors, was looking its best, and richly deserved all the encomiums lavished upon it by strangers.

Facing the girl, as she stood now leaning against the rails of the small rustic bridge, was the grey old mansion, with its battlemented walls and mulioned casements, while to the right and left stretched a smooth, grassy lawn, and bright, many-hued flower-beds.

"A splendid place, certainly; and how happy I could be here! But then—why did poor dear papa add that terrible condition! Lester Frere! Bah! how I hate the sound of those two words already! And what would it be to hear them repeated day after day, till goodness knew when! And that the man himself! Some small wizened-looking creature, I have no doubt, who congratulates himself upon having so easily secured one of England's fairest ancestral domains;

and who will spend most of his time in going about hunting up musty and dim-coloured volumes, for Mr. Street says he is very learned, and, of course, one knows what that means! Ah, me! Sooner than marry such a man I will relinquish all this, though it would be a bitter pang to do so, "t' true. But still, I am fully determined that I will marry no man unless I love him first!"

A faint throb stole over the girl's fair face, while a soft look flashed into her large, dark eyes.

"S, Lester Frere (how I do hate the name!) may just live here by himself, and study his sad-coloured volumes in peace, and free from all interruption, as far as I am concerned. Marry a man who pretends to love me, while all the time it is my estate and wealth that usurp his real affections! No, never! So let Lester Frere claim the Manor House as his own, and I—I will be content with the small income which will still remain to me. But I am forgetting poor dear Ellie all this time. I should think she

must want some tea after her long chat with Mrs. Dent. "I will return at once."

So saying, Maude Raymond drew herself up and turned away towards the distant gray pile, across the small bridge, and on past flower-beds, bright with scarlet geraniums and golden calceolaria, and so up to the stone steps leading to the hall door.

Just within the spacious stone entrance the girl was met by a lady—an elderly person, with sweet face and pretty brown hair just streaked with grey.

"My dear Maude! I am glad you are returned from your ramble of inspection, for I was just getting rather nervous respecting you."

"Nervous, Ellie, dear! Why you need not fear for me, surely, in the broad daylight!" replied the girl, laughing; and then, stealing one hand within her companion's arm, she turned, and with her entered a room upon the left.

"But Maude, dear! Mrs. Dent has been telling me that there is a large party of gypsies encamped near here, and I thought that perhaps you—"

"Might have allowed some of them to cross my palm with silver for the sake of hearing more about Lee—, my unseen and unknown future husband, eh, Ellie? Confess, now, that your fears were more respecting the vulgar fortunetelling than any personal harm that could befall me from that wandering tribe?"

Mrs. Ellis smiled gently as she returned the girl's merry look; but she shook her head gravely.

"No, Maude. I was not at all alarmed about you having your fortune told; but one hears and reads such things nowadays, and you see, my dear, your jewellery might alone prove a temptation."

"Ah! I shouldn't like to lose my watch, certainly. It was a present from my dear mamma!"

The girl sighed, while a grave look stole over her pretty face as she uttered the sacred name, but the sad thoughts fled quickly at the sound of another voice.

"Will Miss Raymond like to have tea brought in here, or shall I—"

"In here, by all means, Mrs. Dent. And, please, let it be brought up at once, for I am very thirsty."

The staid housekeeper smiled as she turned away, and gave her orders to the maid, standing behind.

"And Mrs. Dent, I am going to ask you to preside; and while we drink our tea, I want you to tell me all you can about the Manor House. I think I once heard that it was haunted."

"Oh, Miss Maude! Who can have told you anything about it?" asked Mrs. Dent, in great consternation.

The girl laughed merrily, as she noted the frightened expression on the housekeeper's countenance.

"Why, surely, Mrs. Dent, there is no great harm in my knowing about this wonderful apparition, that is supposed, at certain periods, to visit here!" she asked.

"Your dear mamma, Miss Maude, was most careful that no mention of the ghost should be made in your presence, when she was alive, and I had hoped that you had heard nothing about it."

"Really, this is getting quite interesting!" exclaimed the girl, in light, mocking tones.

Then added in mock gravity,—

"But Mrs. Dent, you have never seen this ghost, have you?"

"I would rather not say, Miss Maude," replied the housekeeper, in low, awe-struck tones; and she glanced round the room timidly.

"Maude, dear, let us have our tea and do not trouble further respecting an idle rumour. Of course you know so well that there are no such things as—"

"But I do not know it, Ellie; and I am going to get Mrs. Dent to relate all she can about this supernatural personage," interrupted the young girl, then added,—

"Ah, here comes tea. Now, Mrs. Dent, for the tale! Ellie, dear, are you all attention?"

"Yes, dear; but I wish you would not compel Mrs. Dent to talk upon a subject to which she is most averse," gently replied Mrs. Ellis.

"Mrs. Dent, please begin; and Ellie, don't think me very naughty; but I must hear the tale," remarked the girl, as she seated herself in a low chair to the left of the open French window.

"Well, Miss Maude, if you will hear the tale I suppose I must obey, though I wish you had asked me before now. It is growing quite dark in here."

"Ah, that is because there are so many creepers round the window, Mrs. Dent," came the answer, as Maude Raymond drew her chair a little nearer the housekeeper.

"Well, Miss Maude, it must be about a hundred years ago now that a Master Raymond brought home his fair bride, the beautiful and winning Mistress Maude, and just a year later a daughter was born to them, and then there were rejoicings indeed; for there had not been such an event in the family for at least two generations. Well, Master and Mistress Raymond were very proud of the pretty, dark-eyed little girl. Time went on, and the little Miss Maude—"

"My name!" exclaimed the young girl.

"Yes, Miss Maude, and you are the very image of the picture of this Miss Maude Raymond. The same dark eyes, the same brown hair, all wavy, the same—yes, the same beautiful face. The little Miss Maude grew up to be a most beautiful lady, and was much admired and loved by all who knew her. And after a time she had many suitors—some rich and of high birth, the chief of whom was a certain Lord Staines; others poorer and of humbler origin. But to all the beautiful young lady spoke kindly, and treated all graciously; but when they spoke of love to her she turned away and shook her head sadly. She was sorry to pain them; but she could not love them.

"So time went on. Master and Mistress Raymond interfered not openly with their daughter's suitors, but secretly they favoured my Lord Staines. It was the eve of Miss Maude's eighteenth birthday, and on the morrow there was to be great rejoicings held in honour of the event. Numerous were the invitations sent forth for the great ball that was to be held in the evening and all were accepted. And among the numerous guests came a young man—uninvited, it is true; but he had heard so much of Miss Maude's beauty that he was determined to view it for himself. So he stole into the spacious and crowded ballroom unnoticed by nearly all. Now it so happened that he was fortunate enough to render Miss Maude some slight service during the course of the evening, and she— Well, it was a case of love at first sight! They danced several times together, learnt all about each other, and then (very unwisely, it seems to me) Miss Maude promised to meet him again the following day, down by the little rustic bridge in the beech-grove.

"Very unwise of her. But then she had always been allowed her own way, and she was daily growing so tired and weary of my Lord Staines and her other numerous suitors. And—strongest reason of all—she already loved this stranger youth! So they met the following eve at sunset, while her mother reclined in the amber drawing-room, and her father sat with his guests over their wine.

"Meeting followed meeting, till at last the young Clinton avowed his intention of claiming her openly from her proud father. He did so. But his suit was refused with cold and harsh words, and he himself forbidden the Manor House. And every day Lord Staines redoubled his attentions, and was received with more and more favour by both Master and Mistress Raymond. And poor Miss Maude! She came forth from this very room, where her father had summoned her, to tell her his decision—pale, sad, and spiritless, and she continued to be, notwithstanding all the gaiety and merriment around her. The summer passed away, leaving her wan and dejected. Autumn was drawing nigh, when, one evening, as Miss Maude was stealing out alone, to visit the spot where she had so often

met her banished lover, she once again heard Master Clinton's voice, and once again his arms were around her; and then, as they paced together beneath the leafless beech-tree, his arms were unfolded to her, and she agreed to them. A week passed away, during which Miss Maude had daily regained her former bright looks and cheerful ways. And Master and Mistress Raymond were happy again, while Lord Staines took advantage and spoke again of his love. But Miss Maude quickly silenced him by casting upon him cold and contemptuous glances, and then left him suddenly.

"Another week passed away and then, one bright October night, Miss Maude dismissed her maid earlier than was her wont, and speedily set to work to collect all her jewels and other valuables. An hour or so later, when all the household slept, she arose, and throwing a dark and hooded cloak around her, and taking in her hand the small bag containing her jewels, she proceeded cautiously and noiselessly down the broad oaken staircase, across the stone hall, and so on into this very room!"

Here Mrs. Dent paused awhile, and glanced timidly around the fast darkening chamber, while her young mistress rose, placed her empty cup on the table and quietly remarked, as she resumed her seat,—

"Please continue, Mrs. Dent."

"Yes. Into this very room Miss Maude walked, and crossed it in the full light of the moonbeams shining through the window, stopped there by the fireplace. One backward glance, to see if anyone was following her, and then pressing a small knob a panel flew back, and a secret staircase was disclosed. Down this Miss Maude descended, carefully closing the panel after her.

"At the foot of the stone staircase she was met by her lover, who proceeded with her along the subterranean passage till they both emerged once again into the moonlight just below the little bridge in the beech-grove; then quickly along under the leafless trees to the carriage in waiting for them at the further end of the grove. All seemed prospering, when two figures suddenly emerged from some holly-bushes near by. Her father's hands tore Miss Maude from her lover's grasp, and she was borne quickly away, calling upon her lover to save her as she went. Then, as she was being borne quickly away, a shot rang out on the clear frosty night, and simultaneously across a shriek from the poor young lady's lips as she gashed the mud result.

"For weeks she lay unconscious of all around her. And when, later on, consciousness returned to her, it was but the wreck of the once beautiful girl that Master and Mistress Raymond still called daughter! For her mind never fully recovered the terrible shock it had sustained; and she was continually crying out for her lost love. And still, it is said, you may hear the stealthy footfalls down the oaken stairs, and you may watch her slight form cross this very room, and disappear through yonder panel."

The housekeeper concluded in low, awestruck tones, glancing meanwhile in the direction of the fireplace.

Her young mistress rose, and, drawing near to her, said,—

"Show me the exact spot where she entered, Mrs. Dent."

"Better not look down there, Miss Maude," was the answer.

"But I want to. Come, show me the very spot!"

Unwillingly the housekeeper rose, and, with frightened look and slow steps, advanced to the panel nearest the fireplace, and silently placed her finger on a small white knob in one corner.

"Press it, Mrs. Dent," commanded her young mistress.

The timid housekeeper hesitated for an instant, then obeyed.

The woodwork slid aside, and a rush of damp air followed.

Both drew back at the same moment.

"Come away, Maude, dear!" pleaded Mrs. Ellis from her seat.

"Just one look down, and then I shall be

satisfied," replied Maude Raymond, as she advanced and glanced down the dark stone staircase. "What a dismal place!" she exclaimed, then herself closed the panel, and turned to the housekeeper at her side.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Dent, for telling me the tale. I shall dislike the Manor House more than ever now that I have heard this. But, Ellis, dear, I am afraid we have kept Manners waiting. I ordered the carriage to be round by seven, and now it is eight!"

No reply from Maude Raymond's chaperon.

"I think the lady left the room while you were looking down the staircase, Miss Maude. Perhaps the tale frightened her. I do hope you will think no more of it, Miss Maude."

"Oh, pray don't be alarmed for me, Mrs. Dent!" replied the young girl, gaily. "I never believed in ghosts; but I do think it would be nice for you if there were someone living here. I must consult Mr. Street, and see what he can do towards obtaining a tenant. Are you not nervous yourself sometimes, Mrs. Dent?"

"Well, Miss Maude, and tell you the truth, I do feel a bit frightened now and then, and especially at those times when the ghost is to be seen," replied the housekeeper, glancing timidly round the room meanwhile, and speaking in lower tones.

"Then I will certainly do my best to get a tenant. That will make the place seem livelier for you, Mrs. Dent."

"Thank you, Miss Maude."

"Now, I must really go. Good-bye, Mrs. Dent, and don't think too much about the ghost," and then the young girl turned away and took her place in the carriage, wherein was already seated Mrs. Ellis.

One wave of the hand to the housekeeper, who had followed her to the hall-door, and then Maude Raymond and her companion were whirled away to the former's pretty villa at Richmond.

Maude was an orphan.

Her father had met his death in India while taking part in a tiger-hunt. The enraged beast had suddenly turned and made a frantic leap at the horse carrying Oscar Raymond. The startled animal reared, then missed its footing and rolled down a steep bank, carrying its unlucky rider with it. The rest of the party, pausing that way only five minutes later, were horrified at the spectacle that met their sight. They bore the poor mangled body of their comrade back to the town, and gave it burial, and then a message was despatched across the sea to the poor widow.

Maude was but five years old then; but, child as she was, her father's death made a great impression on her childish mind, and she was able to join her childish tears with those of her widowed mother. The latter was so overcome by the shock that she only survived her husband a few months. And then the little Maude was left alone in the world; rich in this world's riches indeed, but alone—quite alone as regarded friends and relations.

Mr. Street, the family solicitor, was appointed her guardian, and nobly did the good man set about the performance of the trust assigned him.

A happy and comfortable home was found for the poor, lonely little heiress in a small town in *la belle France*.

Twelve happy years did Maude Raymond spend in the establishment of the good and high-principled Madame Vervier. Twelve years, during which time the orphan grew up from a small, dark-eyed child, to be a beautiful maiden of sweet seventeen.

And then her guardian proposed that at that age she should leave the retired life at Ardres and return to her native land, and take her place in the society to which she rightly belonged, by virtue of her birth and wealth.

Sad, indeed, was the parting between the good Madame Vervier and her loving pupil. And then Maude Raymond, the beautiful heiress, returned with her guardian, and soon after took up her residence in a pretty villa at Richmond, chosen for her by her faithful adviser, accom-

panied by a Mrs. Ellis, whose duty lay in that of chaperonage to the beautiful girl.

And now, on the day on which my tale commences, Maude Raymond has paid her first visit to the grand old Manor House—her ancestral home. But a few days previously she has heard from Mr. Street the conditions by which alone she can retain possession of the grand old pile. The conditions—namely, that she consent to wed and become the bride of a certain Lester Frere.

So runs her father's will, and there is no gainsaying it. Either become the bride of a man, as yet unknown to her, or else for ever relinquish her claim to the stately home that for so many generations has acknowledged none but a Raymond as master!

She has pondered much over the alternative, and has come to the conclusion that she would rather allow the Manor House to pass away to a stranger than ally herself to that stranger—did she not love him?

And Maude Raymond was possessed of a strong will.

Long that same night upon her return from visiting the house of her forefathers, did she sit by her open window and reflect upon all this, and then the housekeeper's sad tale returned to her, and she smiled as she recollected the frightened eyes and timid countenance of the narrator.

"Poor dear Mrs. Dent! I really do pity her, and I will certainly write to Mr. Street to-morrow, and ask him to procure a tenant. Strange that anyone can be so foolish as to actually believe in ghosts! Such very unreal beings as they always prove to be known!" she soliloquised. And then she thought of Lester Frere, and pondered, again and again, over her father's reason (unknown to her) for thus adding such a conditional clause to the will made in her favour.

"I will never marry a man I do not love! Never!" she murmured, as she at length rose from her seat at the open window; and, gently closing it, repaired to her couch, where she was soon dreaming over again the tale told by the housekeeper at the Manor House.

Mr. Street duly received a letter from his beautiful ward, desiring him, forthwith, to procure a suitable tenant for the Manor House.

"I wish this, as I feel it will be better for Mrs. Dent. Poor woman! She seemed so nervous yesterday, when telling me the history of the 'supposed' ghost, that I decided it would be better for her if she had more people about the place. So I shall be much obliged if you will at once take steps to get a tenant. I do not think I shall ever care to live there myself; not because I fear the ghost!"

So ran the letter, and Mr. Street smiled at its final words; then sighed softly, as he murmured—

"Poor little Maude! Am I right in concealing all I know of him? Yes, I must be, for it was her father's special wish that she should meet him first as a perfect stranger; and then, if she—. But she is sure to fall in love with his choice. She can't help it, if he is at all like the photograph he sent me this morning. By the bye, what did I do with it?"

The lawyer pushed aside some of the papers lying so thickly on the desk at which he was seated, and drew from under them an envelope bearing a foreign post-mark.

"Yes. You are a decidedly good-looking fellow, and I have no fear but that you will suit the fastidious taste of my lovely ward," he murmured, as he drew forth the likeness and regarded it through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Shall I send her this? No. That would scarcely be fair. I will leave well alone, and allow them to meet as strangers; but once they do meet, I prophesy that matters will go smoothly enough, and the wedding-bells will speedily—"

Here Mr. Street's soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of a clerk, who was followed by a small, girlish figure, dressed daintily in soft falling cashmere.

"Miss Maude!" exclaimed the astonished solicitor, as he rose and warmly greeted his fair visitor.

"Yes, Mr. Street. I have no doubt you are

rather surprised to see me, but I could not resist the inclination to pay you a visit."

"And Mrs. Ellis, Miss Maude?"

"Oh, Ellis is so charmed with certain gowns and so forth at Madame Pelet's, she finds it hard to tear herself away from them, or to make a decisive choice. So I suggested that she should call for me here when she really has finished her shopping."

"Which I hope may not be for some time, Miss Maude," gallantly replied the lawyer, as he proceeded to place the most comfortable chair in his office possessed for the accommodation of his visitor.

"I shall not be disturbing you, Mr. Street?" asked the girl, presently.

"Not at all, Miss Maude. I was just idling my time away when you entered."

"And you received my letter, Mr. Street?"

"Yes. I have it here, and I shall send to an advertisement to the principal papers to-day, and I have no doubt the Manor House will not long remain tenantless."

"I hope not, for Mrs. Dent's sake," laughingly replied Maude Raymond. Then added, "What a charming residence it would make for an artist, Mr. Street! I noticed so many lovely bits yesterday, and I hear the neighbourhood is very lovely!"

"Ah, what a happy suggestion, Miss Maude! And that reminds me that I had an application to-day from—from a friend of mine. He is now in Germany, but is meditating a return to England, and he commissions me to look him out some picturesque house, where he may have ample scope to indulge his artistic tastes."

"And he is an artist, Mr. Street?" asked the girl.

"Yes; and will become very famous some-day—will—my young friend!"

Maude Raymond noted her companion's hesitation, and the abrupt ending of his sentence, and asked no further questions, but merely remarked,

"I do hope he is strong-minded enough not to believe in the return of spirits from their unseen world."

The grey-headed lawyer laughed.

"I have no fear that any spirit, seen or unseen, will alarm my young friend, Miss Maude. Judging from what I remember of him as a boy, he is much too matter-of-fact to be strong in superstitions."

"I wish poor Mrs. Dent were more of his nature!" replied the girl, rising, and glancing out of the window down into the street below.

"Ah, there is the carriage!" she exclaimed; "and now I must bid you good-bye, Mr. Street."

"Good morning, Miss Maude. Have been most delighted to see you!" returned her guardian, grasping cordially the daintily-gloved hand extended to him.

And then, as Maude Raymond passed the desk, strown so thickly with its dry and uninteresting papers, something caught her eye—something so totally unlooked for there, among all that dry and musty correspondence, that the girl stopped; and, oblivious of all etiquette, took it up from its resting-place, and scanned it eagerly with her lovely dark eyes.

"What a handsome face, and what glorious eyes!" she exclaimed, unconsciously.

Then remembering herself, she turned to where stood her guardian, and apologised, in her pretty way, for the great liberty she had taken.

A peculiar smile flitted across the face of her companion, as he quietly asked,—

"You agree with me that that is the likeness of a very handsome man, Miss Maude?"

"I do, indeed!" she replied, earnestly, continuing meanwhile to gaze on the photograph she held.

It was the likeness of a young man, probably of not more than three or four-and-twenty years of age.

The face itself was perfect. The noble-looking brow, surrounded by heavy clusters of dark hair, the well-shaped nose, the full and perfectly modelled lips, partially revealed beneath the heavy drooping moustache—all these were perfect, but the chief charm of the whole lay in the glorious and eloquent eyes that looked forth from their

long lashes—the picture of a very handsome man—and a fascination seemed to enshroud it; for the girl, so earnestly regarding it, seemed loth to withdraw her gaze, while the grave man of business at her side interrupted not her lengthy perusal of the perfect features, but regarded her with a peculiar and well satisfied smile.

"That face will haunt me, Mr. Street, I am sure!" Maude Raymond exclaimed, as she at length, with a sigh, laid down the photograph. But still her gaze was attracted to it. "That reminds me, Mr. Street," she continued. "I have been thinking much of the condition attached to my father's will, and I have come to the conclusion that I would much rather relinquish the Manor House than contract a marriage with a man I do not—care for!"

Mr. Street smiled, then replied,—

"My dear Miss Maude, how can you possibly judge now of the state of your feelings towards your future husband, when, as yet, you have never met?"

"That is true, certainly, Mr. Street. But supposing, in the meantime, before this husband of mine appears—supposing I meet another, and learn to love that other—am I, then, to sacrifice all my feelings and turn away from such love and unite myself to a man I feel I shall never, never like?"

"Stay, Miss Maude. You are only uttering suppositions, after all said and done. Supposing now, on the other hand, that this future husband of yours—chosen for you by your late father—supposing he is possessed of handsome exterior, and of an equally noble and attractive mind—in fact, all that any young lady could desire—would you then still refuse to link your destiny with his, and thus fulfil your dead parent's wish?"

The grey-headed lawyer spoke earnestly, and the young girl coloured slightly as she replied.

"I suppose not in that case, Mr. Street. But another reason I have—I should not like to be loved, even by the handsomest of men, simply for what I possess. You understand, Mr. Street?"

"Perfectly, my dear Miss Maude; and I firmly believe that such will never be your case. I have known you from a child, remember, and your character is now what it was then, while your beauty alone—"

"No flattery, please, Mr. Street! Now I must be going, or Elise will think I am lost. Good-bye, once again, Mr. Street!"

"Good morning, Miss Maude. I will not forget the tenant!"

"And I will not forget your friend's face," laughingly replied the girl, as she turned away to descend to the carriage.

A few minutes later and she was sitting and listening and discussing; but her thoughts were far away in the meantime—far away from the subject she was thus apparently engrossed in; for the perfect face of her guardian's client in Germany still haunted her, and continued to do so for the remainder of that day.

That night, as she again sat at her chamber window, she recalled to her memory the eloquent eyes which had looked forth at her from the surrounding cardboard; and she felt that such must be the face of the man whom she could be induced to recognise as her husband.

"If it were not a foolish vow I would register it now this very moment!" she murmured, as she drew closer around her her costly dressing-gown, and leaned farther forth from her open window.

Outside all was hushed and still. The moon rode proudly along in the sky. The stars shone brightly, while from the garden below was wafted the faint essence of dewy rose and fragrant magnolias.

"Yes, I would vow that none other but the possessor of those perfect features and glorious eyes should be my husband. But it is a foolish vow, for he may already belong to another—this I hope not. Shall we ever meet? He far away now in Germany, with so many miles between us! I am afraid not!"

And then the dark eyes grew softer, while a sweet smile lurked around the small mouth as Maude Raymond thought of the face, seen for

the first time that day, and wove sweet and fanciful dreams anent it—sat on at her chamber window, dreaming this, till tired nature interposed, and she was finally fain to seek once again her couch.

CHAPTER II.

"LESTER, old fellow, I have heard the news!"

"The news! What news?" asked Lester Frere, glancing up from the easel, before which he was seated, with a look of surprise.

"What news, Lester? Why, the saddest news (to me, at any rate) that I have heard for many a long day!" returned Max Kron, advancing still farther into the room, and regarding with artistic-like glance the painting upon which his friend was engaged.

But the latter still looked mystified.

"Lester, old fellow, I shall miss you most of all!" quietly remarked Max Kron, presently, and as he spoke he laid a fair, bowed head upon his friend's shoulder, and looked down sadly.

"Ach, mein freund! So you, too, have heard of my departure for the land of my birth!" questioned Lester Frere.

"I have, Lester; and the news grieves me sorely! You see, you and I have always been such friends ever since you first came to this small town; and—and I shall miss you, old fellow! Must you really go? and so soon?"

"I must, Max. Business calls me, or else I would willingly linger here amid the hills and valleys, and among all my kind and good friends, of whom I hold none dearer than Max Kron!" answered Lester Frere, rising from his easel, and proceeding to criticise the painting before him.

"Nice little bit that, oh, Max!" he asked presently.

"Very! One of your best, decidedly, Lester; but if I may be allowed to suggest a slight alteration—"

Max Kron hesitated and stopped, waiting for permission before he ventured to point out what in his seemed a fault.

"You may be permitted to name any correction that you deem expedient," laughingly put in Lester Frere.

"Well, then, mein freund, if you remember, the shade on the hills was not so intense that evening when you and I viewed them together! Do you recollect it, old fellow? and Elise was with us also. Ach!"

And a ponderous sigh broke from the fair-haired German as he turned away with a shake of his head.

"You are right, Max. I have made the atmosphere too bright, and I can't exactly recall the particular shade. What say you? Do you feel inclined to accompany me to that point once again before I bid farewell to these dear hills?"

"I will come," quietly replied Max Kron.

Half-an-hour later and the two artist friends were stretched at full length upon the short, dry grass, while their eyes were intently fixed upon the scene—the distant blue hills.

"Beautiful light that!" exclaimed Lester Frere, presently.

"Very good; but not so decided as it was that night when Elise was here," replied Max Kron. Then asked abruptly,—

"Lester, have you seen her to-day?"

A flushed Lester Frere's cheeks for an instant, then quickly died away as he made answer carelessly,—

"Let me see. Yes. I believe we met down by the well this morning; but I really can't remember anything connected with our meeting. You see, one runs against the same people here in this small town so very often, that it is difficult to determine times and seasons."

Max Kron raised himself slightly on his elbow, and regarded his friend in astonishment.

"She will miss you as much as any of your friends, Lester," was all he said, but there was much implied in the tone.

"The little flaxen-haired coquette!" laughed the other, merrily; but there was a slight tinge of bitterness meanwhile.

"Oh, she may be coquette to some, old fellow,

but not to all," sententiously responded Max Kron.

"She is welcome to play all her pretty tricks on me, Max, for I am proof against all such love-making wiles."

"How so?"

"Ah, that reminds me. I have found you such a good and true friend that I may as well confide in you the real reason why I am thus returning to my native land. But before I commence I must have a cigar to assist me."

The cigar was produced and placed between the young artist's lips; then, after drawing several good puffs, he continued,—

"You must know, Max, that there is a lady in the case."

"I thought so!" muttered the other, as he, too, puffed away.

"Yes; and a great deal of romance."

"Can't stand anything sentimental myself," again came the interruption from Lester Frere's listener.

"I am recalled by an old family solicitor to make love to a young lady whose father thought fit to choose as my future wife."

"And you approve of the choice? Is she handsome? Is she wealthy?" asked Max Kron.

"Three questions, all in one breath, my good fellow!" exclaimed the other, merrily. "Let me answer the first. Unfortunately the choice does not lie with me. If the lady chooses to discard me she is at perfect liberty to do so, only in such case she forfeits a large sum of money, and one of the finest old manor houses that England boasts of. That is all."

"If she discards you! You surely are not contemplating ought so insulting to your good looks, Lester Frere!" gravely inquired his companion.

The young artist laughed long and loudly.

Unfortunately, women do not always allow their affections to be guided by fine eyes and a handsome figure! Still, I hope I may have a chance with the beautiful heiress."

"And you have never yet met?"

"No. Her father's will stipulated that I was to reside abroad till the young lady's education should be considered finished, and she herself fairly launched into society. Then it was deputed to her guardian to arrange the first meeting; and now the moment has arrived, and I am recalled to undergo the ordeal."

Something like a sigh escaped Lester Frere's listener, as the former ceased his talk, while a wistful look shone for an instant in Max Kron's eyes as he earnestly regarded the face of his friend.

"Poor Elise!" escaped his lips in low tones.

His companion shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, while again the red flush appeared in his cheeks.

"Max, old fellow! Believe me, she is not to be pitied. Coquette she may appear to us, but I have seen more of her heart than she imagines. Yes! I hold the key to it; and—well, plainly speaking, if you could only unbend a little when in her presence, I think—Max! you love Elise!"

Max Kron threw away the stump of his cigar, but answered never a word, though a winsome and tender look crossed his face at his companion's words. But he was silent still—silent so long that the other, feeling that he had spoken too plainly—spoken unadvisedly—stretched forth his hand, and grasping that of his friend, continued,—

"Max, old fellow! I beg your pardon; I did not mean to speak so plainly; but—"

"No apologies, Lester. I am not offended with you in the least. Only your words have set me a-thinking, and I did not feel inclined for speech just then. But you are right, Lester. Yes! You know full well that you are the only man I would confess this to—but, I do love her, and she loves me not!"

Sadly spoken; while again, the upward-breathed sigh testified to the heavy heart.

"Are you so certain that she loves you not? I called her coquette awhile since; but coquette though she may have been to me and others, yet, believe me, I speak what I know to be a certainty—she loves my friend, Max Kron! Nay!

I should not speak thus positively on such a subject were I not assured of the truth of my words. How I gained my knowledge matters not; but a few words uttered by a woman, when she believes herself to be quite alone, are surely sufficient guarantee."

But still Max Kron shook his head sadly and despairingly—still the wistful look was on his face.

"I would give much to know that such is the case, Lester. Of course, old fellow, I do not doubt your word for an instant, but she may have changed since then."

The words were spoken so sadly that Lester Fere was fairly moved.

"Cheer up, Max!" he exclaimed. "And, remember, when the hour arrives, and you hear from the young lady's own lips what I prophesy—you may hear at any moment that you choose to make trial—remember, then, in your hour of billets that your friend was not mistaken, and wish him the same success. Now, I suppose, we had better be returning to the town. I am promised to two or three places before midnight."

So the friends rose up from their lounges on the short, dry grass, and, arm-in-arm, set off at a good pace on their return journey.

A tenant was found for the Manor House—none other than Mr. Street's young artist friend from Germany, and the fac-simile of the likeness which had so fascinated and attracted Maude Raymond.

"It is a capital spot for you still to indulge your love of your palette and brushes, Dumont," Mr. Street had remarked at the interview that had taken place upon the artist's arrival in England, "and all the better for our plans, too."

And the man of business rubbed his hands gleefully, while a look of satisfaction spread over his genial countenance.

And then had followed a lengthy discussion between the two men, with which we have nothing to do at present.

And now Lester Dumont is at the Manor House, and duly installed in the "ghostly" room, much to Mrs. Dent's vexation.

The latter has waxed eloquent upon the superior advantages respecting light and prospect of the other rooms at the Manor House, but Lester Dumont has been obstinate and deaf alike to her eloquence and persuasions, and has come off conqueror.

And behold him now seated in the "ghostly" room which has already attained somewhat of the nature of a studio.

A large easel occupies the centre of the apartment, while palettes and brushes are scattered around in true artist-like disregard to tidiness and order, and a large roll of canvas leans against the very panel through which the ghost is supposed to disappear on her way down the stone staircase.

Mrs. Dent sighs, but finds words and sighs alike to no purpose; so, at length, being in a measure, reconciled to what she can't avoid, she becomes affable enough to the artist, and descants freely upon the beauty and goodness of her young mistress—the owner of the grand old Manor House—while Lester Dumont paints away, almost indifferently, seemingly, to his garrulous companion; but, nevertheless, drinking in greedily every word.

Her beauty has been much extolled, but here Mrs. Dent's eloquence is insufficient and inadequate, and Lester Dumont has but a hazy picture of his chosen bride's loveliness: dark eyes, beautiful wavy brown hair, pretty figure.

But Mrs. Dent cannot give what the artist most requires—the expression of the countenance; and so he must wait till the opportunity shall arrive when he may meet her.

And so he sits painting at his easel, thinking much of the fair owner of the Manor House, and—waits.

party Mrs. Clements had gathered together in Yelham Woods for her annual picnic. The season was nearly over, so that the assemblage was a numerous and aristocratic one.

Fair faces, charming dresses, good-looking men; and, to crown all, a lively and most indefatigable hostess. Such a picnic was sure to prove a success!

But among the fair beauties gathered there beneath the grand old beeches—and there were many such—none attracted such universal attention and homage as Maude Raymond, the beautiful heiress.

Attired in one of Worth's own marvellous and artistic costumes, she passed hither and thither with graceful steps and smiling face.

But even as she smiled and returned wit for wit, her thoughts were elsewhere.

Ever and anon, as she received the proffered attentions of those whom she knew would willingly exchange the respectful demeanour and partially concealed admiration for something a little warmer, her memory reverted to the face seen but once; but oh! how it haunted her!

"If he were only here!" she repeated, mentally, for the hundredth time, as she rose with the others from the informal repast designated "luncheon" by their charming hostess.

Then the party broke up into little detachments of twos and threes, and prepared to disperse in every direction.

"Miss Raymond, I am afraid you are tired!"

The tone, the words, were those of one of the beautiful heiress's most ardent admirers.

Yes. Arthur Lascelles alone had noted—taught from love's own page—the abstracted look that stole from time to time over the fair face of Maude Raymond—noted the wistful, sad look that would creep into the lovely dark eyes, even as she joined in the gay badinage and merriment around her.

But the lover's quick glance had detected the weariness that vented itself in the upheaval, slight though it was, of the rich lace adorning her bodice, the faint motion as though of a half-suppressed sigh.

Yes, Arthur Lascelles noted it all, and a pang of jealousy shot through his heart. And yet he knew his case to be hopeless!

He, a younger son of an impoverished family, thus aspiring to wed with the beautiful heiress—the belle of the season! And yet he had dared to fondly dream that he might yet win her.

"You are tired, Miss Raymond!" he repeated as he again noticed the abstracted look stealing over the fair face of the girl he so fondly—so hopelessly—loved!

Maude Raymond glanced up with her dark eyes, and smilingly replied,—

"I believe I am. The sun is so powerful. Do you not find it so, Mr. Lascelles?"

"I do, Miss Raymond; and if you will allow me, I will take you to a delightfully cool spot not far from here. Will you come?"

"Willingly. I so long for some shade and shelter from this burning sun," replied the girl, as she turned away, with Arthur Lascelles at her side.

A few moments' walking brought the couple to the banks of a small stream.

"What a charming spot! I am so much obliged to you for bringing me to such a lovely spot. Shall we rest here awhile?"

"Certainly, if you wish it, Miss Raymond. But I will fetch a camp-stool if you will not mind waiting here alone for a few minutes, Miss Raymond."

"It is too good of you! But pray do not hurry on my account; I shall employ the time in exploring the stream a little farther up," replied Maude Raymond, waving an adieu to her companion as he turned away in quest of a camp-stool.

Left thus alone, the girl watched the retreating figure of her escort, and smiled faintly as he turned from time to time, and waved an adieu to her.

At length the intervening bushes hid him from her gaze, and then slowly the smile died away from the pretty red lips, as with a deep-drawn sigh the girl wandered on for a few yards further up the stream.

The bushes became thicker and thicker here, and it was with some difficulty that she could at places gain a passage through them, and that not without destruction to her dress.

But still an inward impulse compelled her to go forward, till, finally, she sank, tired and weary, down by the side of the little stream.

Tall fox-gloves reared their heads and tossed their pink bells all around her. But she heeded them not, so deeply was she lost in her own reflections.

And these! They were both sweet and sad, and were called forth by the remembrance of the photograph lying amid the business papers in her guardian's office.

She could not put away from her the "glorious eyes" that so haunted her. And she only longed to meet him. And yet that seemed so impossible when Mr. Street had said that he was in Germany.

But still the wish grew more and more intense as she sat on, listening to the soft murmur of the trickling stream, and watching the nodding of the fox-gloves' purple heads.

All was hushed and still around her, and, believing herself to be quite alone, she suddenly covered her face with both her hands and exclaimed,—

"Oh, that he were here!"

Scarcely had the words left her lips than a slight rustling among the bushes at her left made her uncover her face, and start quickly from her lounging position, and glance hastily around.

The brown and tanned face of a young gipsy girl, with yellow-bound head and bright glittering eyes peering forth from the bushes, confronted her.

For an instant the thought of flight, or of uttering a cry for help, flashed through her brain. The next, and she had drawn herself proudly up, and demanded, in an imperative tone,—

"What do you want?"

The face disappeared for a second; the next, and the gipsy maiden stood close to the beautiful heiress.

What a picture for an artist they formed!

The latter (the heiress), with dark eyes, and delicate lace-trimmed costume. The gipsy, with short scarlet petticoat, plaid bodice, and yellow-bound hair.

"What do you want?" again demanded Maude Raymond.

"Ah, beautiful lady! do not be angry with the poor gipsy maiden! Only let me see your fair hand, and I will tell you all about him—the dark gentleman whom you love so well, but whom you have never seen!"

Maude Raymond started, while a hot blush stole over her face.

The gipsy was quick to note the effect her words had had, and advancing nearer whispered,—

"But you must come away from here, or the other gentleman may return; and he may not like to find you in company with a poor gipsy. Will you come, fair lady, and I will tell you all about him! You have never met him yet, but the time is not far distant!"

So pleaded the girl, as she stood there before the fair heiress in the chequered light.

For a second Maude Raymond stood pondering whether she should listen to what the gipsy could tell her of the man she so longed to meet. Her companion was quick to notice the hesitation, and again commenced her pleading in still more persuasive, if not less whining tones.

"Fair lady, do not hesitate. See yonder, through those bushes, there returns your friend. Quick, follow me! I have much I can tell you, and I only ask a little in return!"

The heiress looked, and distinctly saw the form of Arthur Lascelles coming quickly towards the spot, encumbered by a camp-stool and a good-sized umbrella, intended evidently for her comfort. Before her eyes arose the vision also of that other face, seen but once only; but, oh! how vividly the features were retained on her memory! The thought of it decided her at once. With a proud look on her face, and a haughty,

CHAPTER III.

It was a glorious day in early August. "Just the day for a picnic!" as had been voted repeatedly by each and all of the numerous

"I will follow you, woman; only remember, I trust you implicitly," she followed the gipsy, who quickly plunged through some neighbouring bushes, holding them courteously and gracefully aside, so that her companion's light and fragile attire might not suffer from the thorns. At length she stopped, and turning to Maude Raymond, said,—

"We are safe here from interruption. You needn't fear me, gentle lady. Palma has often been trusted before, and she has never been found wanting."

"I do not doubt you either," Maude Raymond replied. "Now, tell me all you know quickly, for I must return to my friends, or they may miss me; and should they find me here, they—"

"Never fear that, fair lady! But I will tell you all. Let me cross your palm with gold; yes, it must be gold, lady. Palma would not ask it for herself but she has a sister who is dying, and they say she must have wine and other things that are hard for a poor gipsy-girl to get, and she will not touch them if they are stolen."

Maude Raymond drew forth her dainty purse, and taking a shining piece from it, handed it to the girl, whose dark eyes were now glittering with unshamed tears.

"Thank you, lady! thank you! May you be very, very happy with the dark gentleman. He will soon come, and when once you meet, all will be happiness for both. But the place of meeting will be a strange one, and at a strange hour. Listen! One night, when the clock strikes twelve, you will press the little ivory knob; the panel will slide back; you will pass through, down the dark passage, and out into the clear moonlight. And then—then, by the rustic bridge, you will meet your fate. The dark gentleman will be there, and then soon will follow a gay wedding!"

The whining voice ceased; the brown fingers were busy knotting up the coin in the corner of her handkerchief.

Maude Raymond stood transfixed. She had never believed in the gipsy's art of fortune-telling, any more than she had in the workings of beings from the spirit land; but, certainly, all that this girl had told her was probable enough. And then the ivory knob, the subterranean passage, the rustic bridge! How could she have acquired so much knowledge respecting the Manor House?

"Strange, very!" she mused, as she stood with eyes fixed on the ground, totally unconscious of her companion's movements; for, chancing to raise her eyes to further question the gipsy, what was her astonishment to find that she was alone!

How was she to find her way back to her friends? A low cry of alarm escaped her as she turned away to plunge once more into the thicket through which she fancied she had come.

Suddenly, a rustling sound behind her caused her to glance anxiously around, fearful of encountering some enemy. But, instead—

Oh, how can be described the emotion that filled her breast, as her astonished gaze fell on the countenance of the very man whom she so longed to win!

Yes! There, bat in hand, bowing low, with a sweet smile on the perfectly-modelled lips, and a dangerously fascinating light in the glorious dark eyes, stood the fac-simile of the photograph.

She stood scarlet and mute before this man, whose form and image had so completely taken possession of her heart from the first moment her gaze had rested on it—stood scarlet and mute till roused by his voice—a voice so perfectly suited to the face—saying in deferential tones,—

"Pardon me, but if I can be of any service, I shall be more than delighted to render it!"

Then she remembered herself, and returning his bow, replied somewhat confusedly,—

"Thank you; you are very kind. I have unfortunately wandered from my party, and am at a loss how to return to them. These English thickets are so difficult to penetrate."

"Yes!" her companion replied. "I have found them so too. But I think I can restore you to your friends without putting you to the inconvenience of again passing through the briars. I have just seen a gentleman bearing a

camp-stool. He seemed in quest of some one. Probably he may belong to your party."

"Yes! That must be Mr. Lascelles. Please take me to him. He will think I am lost."

The stranger looked disappointed for a moment, then quickly recovered himself, and begged her to trust to his guidance, and he would bring her to the spot where he had last seen her friend.

As they passed along, side by side, he told her a little of himself—that he was an artist; that he had lately returned from Germany, and so forth.

Maude Raymond's heart swelled within her as she listened to the soft, mellow voice, and ever and anon met the tender light in the glorious eyes.

Suddenly, there appeared before them Arthur Lascelles, and it was almost with a pang of disappointment that the girl turned to greet him, though her words belied her true feelings. With a courteous bow, the stranger responded to the thanks that were showered upon him by both, and then he left them to resume his painting.

Meanwhile Maude Raymond turned away with Arthur Lascelles, and answered merrily his numerous questions respecting her straying away.

"I must apologise, I know, Mr. Lascelles," she said, in such a pretty way, and in such a charming manner, that the young man blushed to his very temples with pleasure, and forgave her on the spot.

"But," she continued, "I could not resist the temptation to wander away. It was all so beautiful, and I wanted to follow that dear little brook a little further. But it was not nearly so pretty, after all, and the thorns were terrible. See, here!" and she daintily held up several streamers of lace produced by the same "terrible thorns."

"I am only glad that you are found again, Miss Raymond," Arthur Lascelles answered earnestly.

A determined look was on his face as he added hurriedly, in a voice that trembled slightly,—

"Oh! Miss Raymond, what should I have done had you really been lost to us—to me!"

A shiver passed over the girl's frame as she thought of the face and figure she had met so lately, and parted from so quickly. She dreaded what was to follow. She knew she could offer no stray crumbs of comfort and hope to this young man, whom she knew loved her passionately—as passionately, she whispered to herself, as she loved another, and almost as hopelessly.

And yet not hopelessly in her case, if she might believe the gipsy's words.

That last thought reassured her, so turning herself towards him, she replied in a mocking tone, which smote like a death-knell on Arthur Lascelles' fairest hope,—

"Really, Mr. Lascelles, that is a question much too serious for me to answer. And see! here comes dear Ellis! I must hasten to her and tell her of my late adventure!"

So the picnic came to an end.

The hot July day had been fraught with much to two of the party, who were all so unanimously profuse in their expressions of delight at the charming day they had spent.

But by two of the party the words were uttered indeed, but unattended by any of the feelings that should attend the conventional phrase.

Arthur Lascelles felt he should ever remember that day. From henceforth the sun had set for him; the scent of flowers and the song of birds were as things of naught to him, now that his fair young love-dream had vanished.

Sadly he recognised the bitter fact that he must henceforth plod calmly along the desert pathway of life alone; and it was a cruel and crushing thought to the young barrister, who had given his whole heart to the beautiful owner of the Manor House.

And what of the other?

Mrs. Ellis found her charge very silent and very abstracted that same evening during the rather lengthy drive home. The good old lady wondered at it, for she had hoped that the day

in the woods, spent in pleasant society, would have rallied her from the somewhat dreary state into which she had fallen of late. She attributed it to the effects of the ghost-story heard from Mrs. Dent, and more than once blamed herself for not having been more firm in preventing the dark passage being disclosed to view.

Many a sigh escaped the gentle lady as she noted the listless, aimless wandering from object to object, of her fair charge as they waited later on, for the hour of retiring. But the belle's whole nature had been strangely thrilled that day, and she could scarcely throw aside the spell sufficiently to be true to her usual affectionate, genial manner towards her kind friend and adviser.

It was, therefore, a relief to her when that same friend pleaded a slight headache, consequent upon the excessive heat, and retired to her own room, there to shed a few tears over her charge's altered behaviour.

Thus left alone Maude Raymond's thoughts naturally had free vent for the strange event of the day.

Again and again the gipsy's words occurred to her, and as she pondered on them, the more confused and perplexed she became as to when and how the girl had acquired her knowledge of the subterranean passage.

But each time out of the troubled, puzzling mist, there rose the form and image of the strange artist—the original of the photograph, and for the time being all else faded from her memory—so powerful is the all-pervading flame of love which gilds our lives, assuages our griefs, and is, in fact, the very quintessence of mortal existence.

So the days sped on.

As each morn broke, fair, fresh, and cool, Maude Raymond asked herself whether she should see him again; and as every eve fell, with its soft refreshing dew, she whispered words of hope to her fainting heart, and the intense longing for another word from the mellow tones—another glance from the glorious eyes—grew stronger and stronger.

CHAPTER IV.

"My dear, I now consider it high time that those two young people meet."

No reply being audible, Mr. Street put down the newspaper he had been reading, and glanced across to that corner of the room where, ensconced in a low easy chair drawn close to the fire, sat—and slept—his wife.

"Oh, I must wait awhile, I suppose, to discuss my plans," he murmured, as he glanced down at the sleeping countenance, and then he fell into a train of reflections respecting business matters.

Once during his reverie his eyes rested on a small settle opposite him, upon which was placed a handsome photograph stand.

"Ah, Lester, my boy, you will be considered one of the most enviable and one of the luckiest of men with such a prize as will be yours! And then, my fair ward, when once you have met this Adonis I shall hear no more fine speeches from your pretty red lips relating to relinquishing the old Manor House and so forth. Love must be kindled within your heart at the first glance bestowed on you from those handsome eyes. How I long for the moment to arrive, so that I may indeed prove a true prophet. And then, Lester Frere—"

"What about Lester Frere, my dear? Is he here?" interrupted a voice from the fireside.

Mr. Street laughed aloud as he again crossed the room, and, drawing a chair close to that in which reclined his gentle wife, he seated himself at her side.

"Lester Frere is not here, then!" she continued. "I thought I heard you speaking of him."

"So I was, my dear," replied her husband; "but only to an imaginary Lester Frere or rather to his photograph. But, my dear, are you wide awake now?"

"I believe so, my dear."

"I spoke to you a few minutes since, but received no response, therefore I concluded you must have been under the influence of the drowsy-headed Morphens. Otherwise you would not have been deaf to my remark."

"No, I must have been asleep, I suppose, Hugh. But now what is it you want me to listen to?"

"I have been thinking in my own mind, my dear, that it is high time that those two young people meet, and that they meet here for the first time. Now, Mrs. Street, what do you say to my plan?"

"I quite agree with you, Hugh. You see it would be such an unfortunate thing, supposing she would fall in love with another before seeing Lester."

"Her very own idea, my dear! Yes, I remember when she called to see me at my office respecting a tenant for the Manor House that she herself used that argument. Poor little Maude! I was sorely tempted then to tell her the name of the man whose photograph I could so well see had so taken her fancy; and, in fact, had made so deep an impression upon her. You see, knowing what we do of her character, she is not one to be swayed by little things. No! If she were to fall in love with a man, no matter whether he be prince or beggar, all would be sacrificed to that love. So that, all things considered, I consider it my duty to bring about a meeting between the two."

As Mr. Street concluded he turned his head, and looked earnestly down into his wife's face.

The latter smiled sweetly as she returned the look; then putting forth her hand, so that it might rest in her husband's, she said, in low tones—

"Hugh, you remember how our happiness was being nearly wrecked?"

"My dear, do not let us talk of the past!" replied the lawyer, clasping the small white hand that lay so passively within his.

"I very often think of it, Hugh; but not in sadness; only in thankfulness that I was then allowed to use my heart's truest feelings, and so secure to myself a good and loving husband at a time when, if I had wavered but for an instant, I might have blighted my whole life's happiness, and just merely for the sake of a few more hundreds a year, and an empty title. Ah, I cannot but be too thankful that I was true to myself in those days!"

"My dear wife was sorely tried, I know; but I hope she has had her reward," replied the lawyer.

"My reward! Yes! Ten thousand times over!" earnestly replied his wife, as she looked up lovingly into her husband's face. "For what greater reward can any woman desire for any little sacrifice that she may make than to be ever at the side of a noble and loving husband?"

"Heaven knows, I have tried to make all the recompense that lay in my power to you, my dear wife," said the lawyer, laying his lips on the small, white hand he held with his own.

Silence fell for a few minutes, while husband and wife sat on and thought his or her thoughts.

He reverted to that summer-time when he had secretly courted the woman now sitting at his side—secretly, for was she not an heiress, and was he not then very poor?

Here flew swiftly back to that same summer-time when the days seemed golden indeed, as he stood 'neath the rustling beeches surrounding her ancestral home, and listed to the grave, but loving, tones of her lover. And then came the hour—the moment—when she must decide whether wealth or love was to be hers.

And she had chosen the latter, even though he was near enough inhabiting the proverbial cottage; and she had never regretted her choice. Never!

"My dear, when shall we have them?" asked her husband, presently.

"One day next week will be convenient to me, Hugh. Any day that you like."

"Then shall we say Wednesday next, my dear! And we can ask a few others as well, so as to give those two greater opportunity to steal away to the conservatory without fear of being so particularly noticed. By the bye, I wonder if

Miller has remembered to attend to my new fern? I put it quite away in the shade this morning, and he may not have noticed it. I must go and see to it."

"And while you are gone I will make out a list of people to ask for Wednesday, and also plan out a menu," replied the wife, as her husband rose and prepared to leave the room to see to the welfare of his latest purchase for his conservatory.

CHAPTER V.

LESTER DUMONT was alone with his easel and brush in the oak parlour. His hands were idle at present, for the deepening twilight was against his work. His hands were idle, but not his thoughts—far from it.

From the canvas stretched in front of him appeared the well-shaped head, the very hair, the dark eyes, of Maude Raymond, though he knew her not by that name. His own glorious orbs were fixed on the sweet-looking face as he leaned back idly in his chair.

He smiled to himself as he dreamed his own sweet dream—a dream in which two figures—his own and this other—were wandering together through the beautiful grounds which he could so plainly see through the open window.

Smiled as he dreamed of the sweet red lips upturned to meet his own. Ah! delicious moments! But the dream, with all its fair imagery, vanished, as the cruel fact presented itself to his mind—the bare, cruel fact that he did not know the name of this beautiful girl whom he had learnt to love so well, though but one short meeting had taken place between them.

A sigh escaped him, as he thought also of the hopelessness of his longing and yearning for this fair maiden, whose picture he had so faithfully produced on the canvas opposite him—a proof of how love can also strengthen the powers of memory.

Hopeless he knew his longing to be in one sense; for, was he not bound in honour to another till the word was spoken to release him?

Yes; he acknowledged it all, but still the fact was powerless to keep him from loving the strange beauty whose face and form had captivated him at one encounter.

So he sat there still, with the shadows ever deepening, the singing of the birds gradually subsiding into the occasional "chirp, chirp," as each feathered songster sought its retreat for the coming night—sat on still! The stars came out overhead, and the cool dew descended on the hot earth, and lulled nature's tired-out children to sleep.

He sat on wondering over many things, and thinking not a little of the sad tale connected with the very room which he now occupied. He pictured the ghost to himself as bearing the same face and form of the girl he had portrayed on his canvas—pictured it thus, and knew not for an instant how near he was to the mark.

Had he known it, he would then have been at the picturesque villa at Richmond, kneeling at the feet of his idol shrine, pleading in his mellow tones for the right to love and be loved in return.

Meanwhile he must be content with the riches memory threw in his way, and pass the long summer evenings in weaving bright hopes and fancies of the future, should it ever be his lot to hold the loved one in his arms, and rain sweet kisses on her soft cheeks.

Lights were brought, windows were closed; all the sweet scent of flowers shut out, and with the former disappeared all the illusory dreams in which he had been indulging. Soon after Mrs. Dent appeared, bearing on a salver a single envelope.

Lester Dumont took it up carelessly enough, and laid it down beside him, while he detained the housekeeper to indulge in a little harmless gossip. Had he known what the contents of the neglected letter were to bring him of happiness, it is scarcely probable he would have been content to delay one moment before opening it.

But so it often is in life. Our greatest joy,

our supremest moments of bliss come thus to us unaware, and we treat them as of little or no moment till fully aroused to examine them closely, or till we have to part suddenly from them.

At length Mrs. Dent remembered her supper, and Lester Dumont thought of his smoking pipe. This latter article lay in close proximity to the discarded letter, therefore it was but natural that his eye should fall on the latter.

Mrs. Dent being gone he took it up carelessly, muttering to himself, "From Street," and then proceeded to open it leisurely with his penknife.

The few short sentences, written in the collector's businesslike hand, did not give him much pleasure, at least, judging by the slight frown that momentarily crossed his brow. For the invitation to attend a dinner-party, at which the fair owner of the Manor House was to be present, brought no feeling of pleasure to him.

Still he felt he must not refuse, neither must he neglect to furnish a portfolio with one of his latest sketches of the Manor House and its surroundings. His aim then was to be brought into full play to help amuse the fair owner, of whom he had heard so much from her devoted housekeeper.

Wednesday was the day named, and the hour seven. So the intervening time was devoted to touching up the unfinished work, and placing the same carefully in an artistic-looking receptacle.

At the close of this part of his task a sudden whim seized him to devote a place in the same to the face and form of the beautiful girl whose dark beauty had made such sad havoc in his heart. Yes, he decided he would take it to act as a talisman in case the charms of Maude Raymond, the lovely heiress, should prove powerful enough to sway him for a moment from his allegiance to the fair unknown.

"Ah, Dumont, am glad to see you here! But you are very late," was Mr. Street's greeting to his guest, as the latter advanced up the long and brilliantly lit drawing-room just as the clock was striking the hour of seven on the night of the dinner-party.

"Am I late?" inquired Lester Dumont, letting his eyes rove round the room meanwhile, as though in search of someone.

"Late! My dear fellow, what a question, when I have been looking for you for the last half-hour! And now you have lost your chance, for the present, at any rate," the genial host added, with a glance and a smile in the direction where stood a young lady robed in pure, soft white lace. Her face was turned partially away from the advancing couple, as she laughed and chatted with an elderly man, who seemed all too pleased and delighted to find himself her companion for the time.

"Ah, then I am indeed sorry!" replied Lester Dumont, as his host's glance made him understand his implied meaning.

"But let me introduce you to one another, at any rate," continued the latter, as they now reached the end of the room.

"Miss Raymond," he went on, approaching the young lady in white, "may I introduce an old friend of mine to you? Mr. Lester Dumont—Miss Maude Raymond."

The girl turned slowly, and gave one careless glance in the direction of her host's "old friend."

He, too, glanced up; their eyes met.

"What a thrill passed through the frame of each, as this mutual recognition took place!

But there was no time then for further conversation, as at that moment the signal was given, and the party salled forth into the dining-room, Maude Raymond upon the arm of the elderly man, and Lester Dumont following in wake with a "would-be young" lady all radiant in vivid green satin and flaxen ringlets.

The dinner passed by merrily enough, but two of the party were secretly chafing at the long parade of the many courses, and longed for the time when they should be free to converse apart.

Lester Dumont was obliged to smile and answer his companion's nervous questions respecting his ideas on Government questions, and so forth, as cheerily as his feelings would allow him, and content himself with an occasional

giance across the table to where sat the lovely girl whom he had met but once before, but to whom his whole heart had been given, regardless of consequences.

He faltered himself that she returned these glances, and that, when this was the case, he fancied a deeper shade mantled in her cheeks, and that her eyes drooped prettily before his ardent gaze.

At last the signal to return to the drawing-room was given by the hostess, and the ladies passed out. A few minutes later and Lester Dumont found himself leaning against the crimson curtains which, in a measure, formed a screen around the deep embrasure where reclined the beautiful mistress of his present residence.

She was alone; and, as he approached, her large dark eyes had been raised to his, then quickly lowered, while a vivid blush overspread her face. He knew now that the girl whom he had met in Yelham Woods, and whom he had so secretly worshipped ever since, was one and the same with the beautiful heiress, Maude Raymond, of whom he had heard somewhat from his friend Mr. Street.

But this knowledge had brought him great joy; for—

But that was his secret!

And so he stood and looked down and noted the varying expressions sweeping across the lovely countenance so near his.

She seemed conscious of his presence there; and yet, strange to relate of her, so accustomed to the world's meaninglessness "nothings," she maintained a studied silence.

Only the ever-changing shade of carmine in her oval cheeks, and the constant plucking at the bouquet of stephanotis which she carried, betrayed her.

And then Lester Dumont, noting that her companion of the table was just entering, and fearing lest he should intrude upon them, spoke—only a few common-place words, suggested by the restless employment of the small gloved hands before him. Only that!

But the girl to whom they were addressed was quick to note the suppressed agitation in the speaker's voice. Glancing up with her dark eyes, she laughingly replied to his question,—

"Am I fond of flowers, Mr. Dumont? Yes, I am—passionately. But one would not judge so to see destruction and havoc that I am causing to this dear, sweet stephanotis. Ah! there goes a large spray!"

As Maude Raymond spoke she bent her head and put forth one hand to stay the sweet and fragrant spray of pure white blossoms which her fingers had just detached from their resting-place amid the cool green maidenhair fern.

But Lester Dumont was before her. His fingers closed upon the blossoms, and with a low bow and a glance which seemed to ask permission to keep the same he laid the spray on the lace folds of her white dress.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Dumont. I will try and replace it where it was before, and keep my fingers from farther destruction."

"Such lovely looking blossoms are certainly worthy of a better fate," quietly remarked her companion, then added: "Perhaps you have not yet seen Mr. Street's flowers and ferns? No! Then may I be allowed to be your escort? I can promise you that you will not be disappointed. Will you come, Miss Raymond?"

Silently, and merely bowing slightly in acquiescence, the lovely heiress rose, and, placing her small gloved fingers on her companion's arm, allowed him to lead her away in the direction of the lawyer's conservatory.

This was the man of business' one recreation, and it was fully worthy of the repeated encomiums that it received from visitors. It was very spacious, with here and there a softly splashing fountain arising amid a perfect forest of palms and other exotics.

Rustic seats were dispersed here and there, and in such a manner that their occupants could not be seen by other promenaders.

"What a charming place, Mr. Dumont!"

exclaimed the heiress, as she stopped in front of a huge bank of heliotrope and tea roses.

"I am so glad you admire it, Miss Raymond! When I come to see our host I always make my way here at once and pay my court to all these sweet blossoms."

"But you have but just come from Germany, I believe, Mr. Dumont?"

"Yes. I have spent many years there now Miss Raymond. I only returned a few months since; and at present I am your faithful tenant of the Manor House," Lester Dumont concluded, bowing and smiling, as he let his gaze fall on his lovely companion.

"Please don't mention the Manor House!" exclaimed the girl, while a shadow crossed her fair face.

"I am sorry if I have spoken of anything unpleasant to Miss Raymond; but to me everything connected with the—with my present residence—seems so fraught with beauty and happiness, that I am already deeply in love with the old place!"

A sigh broke from the girl at his side as Lester Dumont concluded, while, disengaging her hand from her companion's arm, she suddenly leant forward and buried her face in a perfect mass of fragrant heliotrope, while a puzzled look stole over Lester Dumont's handsome countenance as he watched her.

Silence fell then for a few minutes, during which Maude Raymond wandered restlessly to and fro from heliotrope to tea-rose, while ever and anon a slight sigh escaped her.

"You will wonder greatly, I dare say, Mr. Dumont, at my exhibiting such great dislike to your present abode!" she said, presently, stopping and confronting him with her large, dark eyes.

"I must confess I am rather puzzled for a reason, Miss Raymond. The house itself is delightfully quiet, and the grounds are so lovely, that at first, I must repeat, I am puzzled to assign a cause why the same should be displeasing to you!"

Lester Dumont's quick and earnest gaze again scrutinised the lovely face at his side, but no response came from the red lips. Her dark eyes beat themselves studiously on the waxen flowers of her bouquet, and again her fingers commenced plucking nervously at the blossoms. Once again the spray became detached from its fern, and it fell at Lester Dumont's feet, and there lay, gleaming white against the dark mosaic tiles.

"My poor, dear flowers!" she murmured then, and looked at her companion.

He stooped low and gathered them up from their lowly resting-place.

Then, acting on the impulse of the moment, he raised the waxen petals to his lips; then handed them to her with one swift, impassioned glance from his glorious eyes.

She blushed crimson as she received them from him; but this time she did not replace them among the ferns, but held them delicately between her gloved fingers.

Both stood silently waiting for the other to speak first—both hearts full and overflowing with feelings that only love can impart—both silent; both deeply agitated.

He was the first to break the silence.

Drawing a little nearer, and lowering his dark head, he said lightly—and yet there was such a ring of passion in his tones,—

"Miss Raymond, would you deem it great presumption if I begged some slight token from you, one trifling, to bear away with me in memory of this present happy time spent here with you amid these lovely flowers?"

A slight rustling of the lace on her bodice and a deeper tinge in her cheeks, were the only signs by which he could tell that she was even listening, so wrapt up in her flowers she seemed.

"Miss Raymond, I grant that it is great presumption on my part; but if it were only one single petal—one single leaf from the ferns you carry—I would cherish it in memory of the short spell of bliss allowed me in company with one whom I could almost wish fate had willed. I should never meet!"

The passionate ring in his voice made her glance up then; and in that one glance she allowed all her soul to be read by her companion.

But still silently she stood, only now she gently held forth the spray of stephanotis.

Lester Dumont took it from her, and placing it carefully away after once again raising it to his lips, he exclaimed again,—

"Yes; I would that fate had never willed that we should meet!"

"Why?" the sound was almost inaudible, but Lester Dumont caught it.

"Because there is no hope for me that this one meeting may be followed by others, Miss Raymond, though I could wish it were otherwise, with all my heart. But I am not free to choose for myself."

"We are alike then, Mr. Dumont!" murmured the girl, softly.

"Yes! Ah! I have heard the story from—
from a friend, Miss Raymond. But still there is hope for you," Lester Dumont continued, glancing keenly down at the girl at his side.

"How?" she questioned eagerly, slightly raising her dark eyes, and letting them rest on the grey ones so anxiously watching her.

"You are not obliged to marry the man."

"No! But I shall have to forfeit the Manor House and a large sum of money."

"But you would not mind that!"

"No! a thousand times, no! I would never bind myself to a man and thus make myself miserable just for the sake of a venerable old pile and a few hundreds. Never! I will sacrifice all, for I feel I can never marry that man now!"

The last word spoken ever so softly, as though not intended for her companion; but he heard it, nevertheless, and something like a look of pleasure and triumph flashed over his face.

Ah! how he longed to clasp that lovely form in his arms, and pour forth into her ear his passionate avowal of love! But he restrained himself by a mighty effort, and replied,—

"And I, too, feel that my task will be harder now that I have met you, Miss Raymond."

A quick sign, a brief clasp of her gloved fingers, and then she asked,—

"You have seen this woman whom you are to marry?"

"Yes!"

"She is beautiful!"

"Very, very beautiful, Miss Raymond."

"And you love her?" spoken in quick, agitated tones as though ashamed to put the question.

But she felt compelled to do so. She was carried away by the ugly green demon, and could not bear that this man, whom she so passionately loved, should confess to loving another.

"Miss Raymond, how is it possible that I can love one whom I have seen but once?"

A little sigh of relief came from the girl's heart. Then she turned her head and glanced round at the scene before her.

"Miss Raymond!"

She was all attention again.

"Miss Raymond! pardon me, but—do you love this man to whom you are promised?"

The colour faded from her cheeks, while large tears welled into the beautiful dark eyes, as, clasping her hands, she glanced up into the glowing eyes regarding her so intently, and replied,—

"Love him! oh, no. I am sure I never can now!"

If the words themselves, and the stress on the last little word were not sufficient to prove the sincerity of her avowal, the mate, appealing glance was more than sufficient.

All unconsciously she had laid bare her very soul to this man whom she had met but once, but whom she so loved!

And he! Again the impulse to clasp her to his heart was nearly overcoming him, but he put it aside, and only remarked, quietly,—

"Fate has been unkind to us both, Miss Raymond; but, who knows, perhaps—perhaps she may be kinder to us in the future!"

Softly spoken, and with head lowered to a close proximity to the pretty one, bending again over the fragrant blossoms.

A deep sigh was the girl's only reply.

And then came an interruption in the person of the host himself, who came as an ambassador from the rest of the company to beg that the artist would show them his sketches.

And so the trio turned away to rejoin the others. Loud murmurs of praise and admiration arose on all sides as Lester Dumont drew forth sketch after sketch, and held it up for inspection, while Maud Raymond stood near at hand, and gazed with deeper aversion than ever upon the drawings, of the place to which she had taken such a great dislike—a dislike which had been greatly increased by her late interview with the artist.

Stooping forward to look at the one now being exhibited, her glance fell on the open portfolio.

Face upwards, and lying on the next painting, was the photograph of a young girl—a young girl, with pretty smiling mouth and large eyes. Maud Raymond's cheeks paled as she looked on it for an instant only. The next and the owner of it had noticed it, and quietly picked it up and put it away in his pocket; but not before his glance had met that of the beautiful heiress—a glance which brought the hot colour to his brow, and caused her to turn away to hide her emotion. And so the evening wore away, and the time for dispersing arrived.

One long, lingering clasp of the hand, and then Maud Raymond and Lester Dumont bade farewell to each other for many a long day.

CHAPTER VI.

"MAX, old fellow, I am delighted to see you!"

"And I you, Lester! But how thin and pale you look!"

"Doh! Ah well I have had a nasty touch of something or the other, and it has pulled me down a good bit. But, sit down, mein freund, and take a weed with me. Your presence alone makes me feel better!"

"Ach, that sounds good!" replied the fair-haired German, as he wheeled forward a low chair for himself, and picked out a cigar from the open box proffered him by his friend.

A few minutes' silence, while both were busily occupied in manipulating and lighting their cigars preparatory to a good smoke; then Lester Dumont spoke.

"And Elise, Max? I was so glad to get the letter and the photograph!"

A deep flush spread itself all over the German's fair countenance as he looked up and caught the merry twinkle in the eyes regarding him.

"Ach, mein Elise!" he murmured, softly.

His companion laughed softly as he continued,—

"No need for me to ask further, Max, old fellow! I was a true prophet, you see, that day on the hill-sides, only—"

"Only it was too much for me to believe," interrupted Max Kron.

"I believe you were jealous of me in those days, Max!"

"No, no; not jealous, only I always acknowledged to myself the greater advantage of personal attraction that you possessed. And you know, Lester, that such influence has much to do with winning a maiden's heart!"

"Yes, I suppose so. But I am glad Elise has shown her good taste, and chosen a man who will make her as good a husband as is to be gained in all the world!"

"Ach, now, you flatter me, Lester."

"When is it to be, Max?"

"In a month's time. I have just run over to get a few things towards the furnishing—Something prettier and lighter than is to be procured in our land. My little Elise is fond of pretty things."

Silence again, while both puffed away. Then Max Kron leaned forward, and, earnestly regarding his friend, asked,—

"And the fair heiress. Is she reconciled to her fate?"

Lester Frere started, and coloured vividly.

"We have met, Max," was all he said.

"Ach!" was all the response his friend gave; then looked up eagerly for more.

"Yes, we have met," continued Lester Frere, "and I find her all that heart can wish. But I have seen so much of women's want of faith, that I thought I would wait awhile before making myself known to my fair heiress-bride in my proper person; though Heaven knows, how hard the task has been to me!"

"And the meeting was favourable!"

"Yes. I loved her at first sight, Max; in fact, I could not help myself!"

"And she?"

Lester Frere smiled gently as he replied,—

"Well, Max, I think she would soon learn to love me."

"Ach, that is well!" said the German; then added, "But when do you meet again? and when do you mean to declare yourself to her?"

"Soon—very soon. Next week I go down to take up my abode for a short time in the neighbourhood of the old Manor House, where she is at present, and then Fate must work the rest!"

"Well, old fellow, I wish you good luck, I am sure; and when the event comes off I want you to promise to bring your bride over to the dear Fatherland, where I can promise in Elise's name, as well as my own, that she will receive a hearty welcome for her sake as well as for the sake of my good and true friend. Now I must be going, as I have made an appointment with a man who understands furniture, and so on, and he is to take me to inspect a large warehouse. So farewell, Lester, my old friend, till we meet again!"

Max Kron rose as he spoke, and held forth his hand to his companion. It was taken by the latter and clasped warmly.

"Good-bye, Max, old fellow! Remember me to Elise, and tell her I expect—. But no, something may yet happen!" broke off Lester Frere.

"Come when you will, Lester. Elise and I shall always be more than glad to welcome you," were Max Kron's final words as he turned away.

(Continued on page 186.)

CLIFFE COURT.

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CHAPTER III.

UNDER ordinary conditions Arline Lester would have found life at the Chase a very pleasant and luxurious thing compared with the frugal economies she had always been forced to practise in her northern home; but unfortunately she was in a position to look under the surface, and her anxiety on Arline's behalf grew deeper as she saw how little Sir Ascot Carlyon thought of or cared for the woman who bore his name.

They rarely met more than once a day at dinner, and not always then, for the Baronet had in a measure relapsed into his bachelor habits, and frequently spent the evening out, or entertained male friends at parties where a lady's presence would only have proved a restraint.

The one thing she had to care for, and which she clung to with a love that almost amounted to idolatry, was her baby. She would sit by his cradle watching him for hours together, and at night, instead of letting his nurse take him, she always insisted on having him with her. It seemed as if she feared to let him out of her sight for a moment longer than was absolutely necessary.

"What she would do if anything were to happen to him Heaven only knows!" Arline said to herself. "He has filled the place in her heart that should be her husband's, and that was Major Stuart's; but if he were taken from her, she would die, or go mad, or—something worse!"

And she was not for wrong in her surmise.

After that first night, when the barriers of her reserve had broken down under the influence of Arline's presence and sympathy, she had care-

fully abstained from uttering a word of her private sorrows, and had even done her best to convince that, if not happy, she was at least content. In good truth, she had always tried hardest to be a thoughtful and submissive wife, and leave no ground of complaint for her husband, and so far she had succeeded—the time was swiftly approaching when she would find submission an impossibility.

She was sitting alone one morning at her desk when Sir Ascot joined her, and looked over her shoulder.

"Whom are you writing to?" he demanded, throwing himself into an arm-chair opposite.

"To Cliffe Court. We are invited to dine there next week."

"And you are accepting?"

"No! I intended saying we had a previous engagement. You told me to do so when I asked you about it yesterday morning."

"I remember, but I have altered my mind since then. I thought the Clifffes were alone, and, as you know, I'm not particularly fond of Master Hubert; but this morning I met him on horseback with the Countess de Roubalx, and—"

"You think her presence will make a difference?" Lady Carlyon added, smiling serenely as he paused.

"It is well calculated to, I should imagine, for she is very handsome, and from the few words I heard her say I fancy she is witty and entertaining. At all events, we will accept the invitation."

"I suppose," Arline, said, hesitating, "you would not care to go without me?"

"Why don't you want to come?"

"Because of Arline. You see she is not invited, and she might think it unkind of me to leave her alone."

"Rubbish! She can't expect you to refuse your neighbour's hospitalities on her account! If she does, the sooner she is undeceived the better. By the bye, Arline, I have come to you on rather an unpleasant matter," he drew his chair up nearer, and looked round to see that the door was fastened. "I want you to write to Mr. Baylis, and tell him to prepare a mortgage deed on part of these estates. The fact is, I have to raise some money, and as he is your trustee as well as your lawyer he will require an authority from you to enable him to go on with the matter."

Arline, watching him very intently, fancied that under the apparent carelessness of his manner there was a certain restless anxiety; and little used to business as she was, it at once struck her this request of his must be of some importance.

"You want to raise money?" she echoed in surprise. "Why you got fifty thousand pounds last year through the sale of that farm that Cuthstance bought, did you not?"

"What has that to do with it?" he retorted, irritably. "I have not sought an interview with you for the purpose of discussing what I did in the past, but to make arrangements for the future."

"I think you are very extravagant, Ascot; you cannot possibly have spent all that money in so short a time without gambling in some way or other, and that you promised you would abandon when I consented to the sale of the Glebe property. My income is, or was, a large one, and ought to be sufficient for our necessities without attacking the principal."

"You need not remind me of your wealth, and my own comparative poverty," he said, bitterly. "Our marriage was a fair exchange—I gave you a title in return for your riches."

Arline was silent, keenly stung by the taunt, although it carried no truth with it.

"The mistake was that I ever consented to that precious marriage settlement of yours," he continued, with gloomy anger. "What does a woman know of money matters, and why should she have anything to do with them? If I had my way the whole feminine sex should be debarred from all such things. However, this is hardly to the point. The fact is I want money, and money I must have."

"Ascot," said his wife, laying an earnest

hand on his shoulder, "have you broken your word to me, and gone on with racing and betting?"

His eyes fell under her clear scrutiny, and he shook off the gentle touch.

"If by 'racing' you mean running a couple of horses I must plead guilty," he replied, with an uneasy laugh. "As to my promise, you must remember I was forced into it, so you can hardly wonder I should make a mental reservation. Listen to me, Alicia"—his tone changed; "I am in a dilemma, and help me out of it you must."

She did not reply, and he went on,—

"That fifty thousand pounds only just set me on my legs, did not by any means clear me, and so I resolved to make a venture at Newmarket, and if it had been successful I should have netted a pretty good sum; as it was, I lost through the d—d treachery of a jockey, and, of course, I found myself tenfold more involved than before—debts of honour, Alicia, which are bound to be paid, or I lose caste for ever. Now, I have another horse, which is certain to win the races for which I have entered him; but, in the meantime, what I owe must be settled, and the only way of managing it is a mortgage. I will pay it off directly I have the money, I give you my honour."

Alicia's lip curled rather contemptuously. Sir Ascot's "honour" when pledged to a woman was not a thing to trust to.

"You must let me think this over," she said, at length, in a low voice.

"It requires no thinking. The fact that I say I wish it should be enough for any dutiful wife."

"Have you ought to reprobate me with in that particular, Ascot? Have I not done all in my power to leave you nothing to complain of?"

"I don't know—perhaps. I suppose we are much the same as other couples."

"I hope not—with all my heart, I hope not!" she exclaimed, involuntarily.

He looked at her and laughed.

"Well, be that as it may, you have now an opportunity of proving your obedience, and doing your duty."

"My duty is a divided one. I have to remember my boy," she said, gravely.

"And you place him before your husband. A model wife, indeed! You will make me wish he had never been born."

She grew very pale, and turned away, and Sir Ascot saw how great a mistake he had made.

"Come, come, Alicia!" he said, putting his hand on her arm, "I did not mean to offend you, but you must confess it is hard to see a baby preferred to me in everything."

"There is no one but me to think of him, you take no interest in his welfare."

"Nonsense! Every man must take an interest in his own child, particularly when that child happens to be his heir, so don't make a fool of yourself by saying unreasonable things. To come back to our starting point, will you write to Mr. Bayliss to-day and tell him to prepare the deed?"

"I will write to him," she answered, with an evasion he did not perceive.

"There's a good girl. Why the deuce could you not consent at first, without making all this fuss? Now can I do anything for you—would you like me to take you for a drive, or ride with you?"

"Neither, thank you. I am going for a walk with Arline, directly after luncheon."

"As you will," he said, preparing to leave.

"By the bye," he added, turning round when he reached the door, "I met a friend of yours at the Molyneux's last night—who do you think it was?"

"I don't know," apathetically.

"Guess!"

"How can I? My circle of acquaintances is a large one."

"I did not say acquaintances; the person I refer to was something more than that."

A deep flushed colour'd Alicia's face from the throat to brow at the significance of his tone, but she only looked at him inquisitively.

"I see you have an inkling of who I mean—Major Stuart, or rather, Colonel Stuart, for he has been promoted lately. He has altered a good deal, looks a lot older than when I saw him last."

"Did you—did you speak to him?" she asked, her lips white and dry.

"I had no alternative, for Hubert Cliffe was with him, and we were brought face to face by Mrs. Molyneux. I suppose he and Cliffe are as great friends as ever—another *Moës* and *Achates*."

When she was alone, Alicia sat still on her chair, her hands clasped tightly together across her bosom. Her heart was beating so rapidly that she positively could not move, and recollections, which she had hitherto banished, came over her in a flood, almost frightening her by their vividness.

She had striven very hard, and, as she fancied, succeeded in rooting out her love for Basil Stuart, and, lo! the mere mention of his name, the thought of his being near, were sufficient to bring back all the old tenderness, even though she was the wife of another man, and the mother of his child!

She threw herself down on the couch, and hid her hot face in the cushions.

"I ought to die of shame!" she said to herself with fierce self-reproach. "How can I ever hold up my head amongst honest women, if, being married, I allow this unholy love to have dominion over me! What can I do to kill it? What can I do—what can I do?"

CHAPTER IV.

CLIFFE COURT was a bizzo of light from garret to basement, and an outlander, viewing it from a distance, might have fancied some gala was going on—the fact that Lord Cliffe was giving a dinner-party would hardly have seemed sufficient excuse for such an illumination.

In the large reception-room—commonly called the Blue Drawing-room—Hubert Cliffe and his uncle were waiting to receive their guests, both in evening dress, and both presenting a very satisfactory, although different, type of an English gentleman.

The room was large and lofty, with a painted ceiling, and a mantelpiece carved by the great Gibbon, the walls were panelled in white and gold, interspersed with mirrors that reached from floor to ceiling, and which reflected in endless vista the dainty appointments and luxurious furniture. A great crystal chandelier hung in the centre, but instead of gas, was filled with wax candles, dozens of which also burned in sconces fixed in different parts of the room, and threw a soft, mellow light around.

"What's the matter, Hubert?" said Lord Cliffe, suddenly, observing a half-puzzled frown on his nephew's brow, "aren't all the arrangements to your satisfaction?"

"Yes, quite; only it just struck me that we might possibly be on the brink of an awkward *contretemps*. Yesterday I met Stuart, and asked him to come to-night, quite forgetting that we had already invited the Carlyon's, and, unfortunately, he accepted."

"Why, unfortunately?"

"Well, he and Lady Carlyon were engaged once, you know, and I am not quite sure that a meeting would be pleasant to either of them."

"I don't think there is any cause to fear a scene," remarked Lord Cliffe, after a moment's thought. "Stuart is a man of the world—not at all given to wearing his heart on his sleeve, and Lady Carlyon herself is too perfectly well bred not to be entire mistress of her emotion."

"Oh! yes, I know that, but possibly they may both think I was to blame for subjecting them to the test, whereas the fact is I had really forgotten all about the matter when I spoke to Stuart."

"Bitter for her if she had married him instead of that scamp Carlyon—it's my opinion he is going to the dogs at the rate of an express train."

"I think so, too," responded Hubert, "and I'm sorry for her sake—she is one of the most charming women I have ever met."

"As charming as Lady De Roubalix!" inquired his uncle, slyly.

"That's hardly a fair question; comparkons

between the two are impossible," the young man answered, and as he spoke the door opened, and the lady in question came in.

A more radiant vision than Clarice, Countess De Roubalix, it is impossible to imagine. She was in the full maturity of her beauty, and all that art could do to render her loveliness more brilliant had been done.

She wore a dress of very delicate ivory satin, trimmed with costly lace that fell about her exquisite arms and bust; a large bouquet of dark crimson roses trailed across her corsage, and a single bud, nestling in green leaves, was plumed by a diamond arrow among the thick braids of her black hair—hair that rippled low down over a white forehead, and rendered the softness of her complexion all the more striking.

It was a peculiar complexion, such as is rarely seen in England—cream white, lighted up by a wonderful glow of carmine on the cheeks, and vivid scarlet lips, whose rich curves might, perhaps, have been a trifle too voluptuous to please some critics, but whose beauty it was impossible for the most captious to deny.

"Am I to play hostess on this festive occasion?" she asked, smiling, as she came and stood between the two gentlemen.

"Of course; who is there more fitting than yourself for the office?" demanded Lord Cliffe, taking her hand and raising it to his lips.

She had already completely fascinated him by her beauty, as well as by the pains she had been at to secure his admiration.

"Certainly, I am pretty well used to the task, but you must remember I don't know any of the county celebrities I am to meet to-night—they will be all strangers."

"You should congratulate yourself, then, inasmuch as you find another world to conquer," rejoined the Viscount, gallantly.

She swept him a pretty curtsy.

"What a courtly flattery you are, Uncle Everard! You would make me believe I was still in France if your appearance were not so very unlike a Gaul's. By the bye"—turning to Hubert—"what do you think of my dress? I got it direct from Paris."

"He hasn't had time to think of the dress yet," interposed Lord Cliffe. "His eyes have not strayed beyond the face of the wearer, as I can bear witness."

"Why don't you allow him to speak for himself—ain't he capable of doing it?" asked the Countess, letting her full, dark eyes rest on the young man.

"My uncle doesn't give me a chance," laughed Hubert. "However, as he has expressed my feelings of admiration so prettily I can hardly quarrel with him for taking the words out of my mouth."

"But were they your feelings?" she said, in a low voice, as Lord Cliffe left them, and opened one of the windows to look out.

"Certainly, you surely cannot think me so unappreciative as to doubt it."

"I don't know. You are rather difficult to please, I fancy."

"Am I? If that is the case then I pay you a compliment all the higher by my admiration. Your bracelet is unclasped. May I fasten it for you?"

She extended her arm—a round, beautifully-moulded arm—with skin as smooth as satin and fair as ivory, and after Hubert had secured the glittering ruby band that encircled it he can hardly be blamed for pressing his lips to the pretty wrist.

"Cousin's privilege," he said, in excuse. "Will you forgive me for claiming them?"

"It is the first time you have attempted to do so," she answered, with a coquettish smile, in which there was certainly no anger.

Later on she proved herself an ideal hostess, receiving the guests with as perfect an ease as if she had known them all her life, and never at a loss for a few gracious words of welcome or a sparkling repartee.

Sir Ascot Carlyon contrived to remain near her, his wife preferring sitting near one of the open windows, where Hubert presently made his way, and began talking.

"I did not wish you good-bye the other day

"when I saw you at the station," he said. "After I had met my cousin I looked round, but you had disappeared."

"I think I rather hurried away on account of Miss Lester, who was tired."

"Then she did come!"

"Oh! yes."

"And is with you still?"

"Yes, but she is getting anxious to 'earn her own living,' as she calls it, and has made me promise to look out and find her a situation. I suppose you can't help me in procuring anything suitable!"

"I'm afraid not, unless," laughing, "she would like to come and be our housekeeper."

"But you have one already. Mrs. Belton has not left, has she?"

"No, but she fell down some steps the other day and injured her knee-cap, and the doctor says she won't be able to get about again for a long time; so, in the meanwhile, we must find a substitute. Of course, we won't hear of her going away, and the poor old lady is in great trouble for fear we should suffer inconvenience through her illness."

Something in Lady Carlyon's face made him stop, and, glancing round, he saw that a tall, military-looking man, with brown eyes and a bronze skin, had entered the room, and was being presented to Lady de Roubalix.

"Ah! there is Stuart," he observed, carefully abstaining from meeting her eyes. "I must go and speak to him if you will excuse me."

Alicia did not answer, but made a slight affirmative motion of the head, and then looked round the room, fearful in her consciousness that every eye was on her. As it happened, however, no one was even glancing in her direction, and Colonel Stuart was still engaged in exchanging greetings with his beautiful hostess, so she had time to notice him and to recover her own self-possession.

How stern he looked, and how much older! And there was a scar on one cheek that had somewhat marred his beauty, but not in her eyes. To her he still seemed as he had ever done, handsomest and noblest among men.

Hubert Cliffe, anxious to do all in his power to make things as easy as possible for both, and thinking that a pointed avoidance of each other would be more calculated to be noticed than anything else, brought the soldier to Lady Carlyon's side.

"Here is a friend you have not seen for some time," he said, and then turned away, leaving them comparatively alone, for they were far enough off from the general group to be out of earshot.

Colonel Stuart bowed, and seemed on the point of retiring, but Alicia put out a little tremulous hand, which he could not afford to ignore without the most absolute rudeness.

"Have you been in England long?" she said, her voice not quite as steady as it might have been.

"Only a few weeks."

"And—and do you intend staying here altogether now?"

"Certainly not. I shall rejoin my regiment as soon as my leave of absence has expired—perhaps before."

His voice was cold as ice, and expressed the most absolute indifference; his manner, strictly courteous as it was, could not possibly have been more frigidly repellent. And yet, all the while he was looking at her and thinking what a sweet and innocent face it was, how well it cloaked the hypocrisy of which he had had such painful experience in the past! His glances wandered downwards to the slim fingers lying on her lap, destitute of rings, save that one broad band, which was rendered more conspicuous by their absence; and she with a hasty movement that was perfectly involuntary, dropped her right hand upon it as if to hide it. He made no remark, and just then Hubert came up again, and offered his arm.

"Permit me to take you to dinner, Lady Carlyon. Stuart, will you bring Miss Molyneux in?"

Lord Cliffe was celebrated for his dinner-

parties; his *chef* was unapproachable, his wines were those of a connoisseur, and his taste had passed into a proverb. The tables, with their snowy damask, on which was woven his own coat-of-arms, the massive silver epergnes filled with choicest flowers, the coloured lamps, which threw a soft rosy light over it all, made a picture by itself; and certainly the guests that gathered round it were a representative assembly of the wealth, rank and beauty of the county. Amongst them all Lady de Roubalix shone pre-eminent, not alone through her loveliness, for her ready wit, her silver laughter, her sweet full tones, and her unfailing brightness were as charming as her beauty.

It was curious to see how these languished directly she left the table, and adjourned with the other ladies to the drawing-room.

She seated herself on a couch, in an attitude whose grace seemed less natural than the result of careful study, and began languidly fanning herself with a huge fan, leaving her guests to amuse themselves as best they might. Lady Carlyon happened to be near her, and to her she addressed a careless remark.

"Gentlemen stay a long time over their wine in England, do they not?"

"Sometimes, not always."

"It is so long since since I have been at a dinner-party in my native land that I almost forgot the British customs," she went on.

"You have lived in Paris, have you not?"

"Partly, and partly in my late husband's château in Normandy. I was married when I was very young—a child, in fact."

"And do you purpose returning to France?"

"No," very promptly. "I infinitely prefer England, and I intend remaining here. I cannot imagine a more delightful place to stay at than that—Cliffe Court."

"It is very charming," Alicia assented, vaguely, and then relapsed into a silence that was unbroken until the gentlemen came in, not having on this occasion lingered long over their wine.

Lady de Roubalix brightened up at once, and on being asked to sing went immediately to the piano, and gave an operatic aria that displayed her fine voice and florid execution admirably.

"Cliffe was always celebrated for nightingales," observed Sir Acol, who had placed himself at her side, "but I have certainly never heard so sweet a one before."

"I didn't know there were any here," said Miss Molyneux, a young lady of a certain age, who had overheard the remark. "I wonder if there are any singing now?" she added, to Hubert Cliffe.

"Probably there are—would you like to hear them?"

"Very much."

He went to one of the windows, and, drawing back the shrouding lace and satin draperies, threw it open, and let in a flood of moonlight.

"What an exquisite night!" exclaimed Lady de Roubalix, who had followed him. "It is really a sin to be indoors."

"Then above yourself from the sin without delay," said Sir Acol, offering his arm, which she took, and they both stepped out on the marble terrace, an example followed by most of the others.

Lady Carlyon was glad to have the chance of being alone for a few minutes, and seated herself on a rustic bench, under the shadow of a copper beech, while the rest dispersed about the grounds in knots of twos and threes.

Before she had been there long the scent of cigar smoke announced someone approaching, and a minute later Colonel Stuart passed, but drew himself up short as he perceived the figure under the trees, which he did not at first recognise.

"Lady Carlyon!" he said, as she made a slight movement.

"Yes, it is I."

He would have passed on, but she prevented him. Knowing what she knew, it was maddening he should treat her thus; and though she was conscious that if she had been wise she would have acquiesced in the line of conduct he had seen fit to adopt, and would have permitted him

to treat her as a stranger, the intense human longing to hear him speak one kind word was too great to be resisted, and she put forth her hand almost as if she would have laid it on his sleeve.

"You are determined to ignore your old friends, Colonel Stuart?" she said, with the ghost of a smile that was infinitely sadder than tears.

He flung away his cigar before answering.

"You are the first person who has ever accused me of fickleness."

"Am I? Perhaps I am the only one who has ever had cause for complaint, and yet we—were friends once."

"Friends!" he echoed, his voice for the first time losing its inflexibility.

"And," she continued, rapidly, "I have not so many that I can afford to let one go. It pains me to know you think hardly of me."

"Does it?" he said, slowly, while his eyes lighted up with bitterest scorn. "I do not like being rude to a woman, but you must pardon me if I venture to doubt your word, Lady Carlyon."

There was a moment's silence, and she looked helplessly away from him across the moonlit lawn to where a fountain was playing, and making a gentle little rippling murmur as it flashed in its marble basin.

If the influences of the scene have any power, then the hearts of both these two should have been softened, for one more calculated to recall tender recollections it would be impossible to imagine. The entrancing spell of a midsummer night was in the air, and from the dew-drenched roses and mignonette there floated subtle perfumes, while indoors someone of the party, who prosaically feared catching cold, was at the piano, from which strains of melody issued that, softened by distance, mingled harmoniously with the low whispering of the leaves, and the murmur of falling water. Over all the white alchemy of the moonlight fell, clothing everyday things with a new and wonderful beauty.

"Friendship between you and me is an impossibility," Colonel Stuart went on, coming a step nearer, and looking down at her with eyes of pitiless contempt. "Friendship argues esteem, and it is very unlikely I should cherish such a sentiment towards one who has deceived me as you have."

She had no longer reason to complain of his apathy—the stern restraint he had set upon himself her own words had broken through, and now it almost seemed as if they had changed places, for of the two she was certainly the calmer.

Perhaps she had done wrong in speaking as she did, in the first instance; perhaps she ought to have gone away now that she saw he was no longer master of his words—but to do this would have required a strong will, and firmness of purpose that she did not possess. She was no heroine, this poor Alicia, no sublimated being above the frailties of humanity, but only a most miserable woman, liable to err, like the rest of us—sweet, tender, capable of endurance for the sake of those she loved, and sharing all the weakness of womanhood.

"It is out of sheer vanity or love of acting a falsehood that you speak to me thus, and talk about friendship!" he went on, his tone one of low, concentrated passion. "Are you not satisfied with having spoilt my life and destroyed all the faith I once had in your sex. What more do you want?"

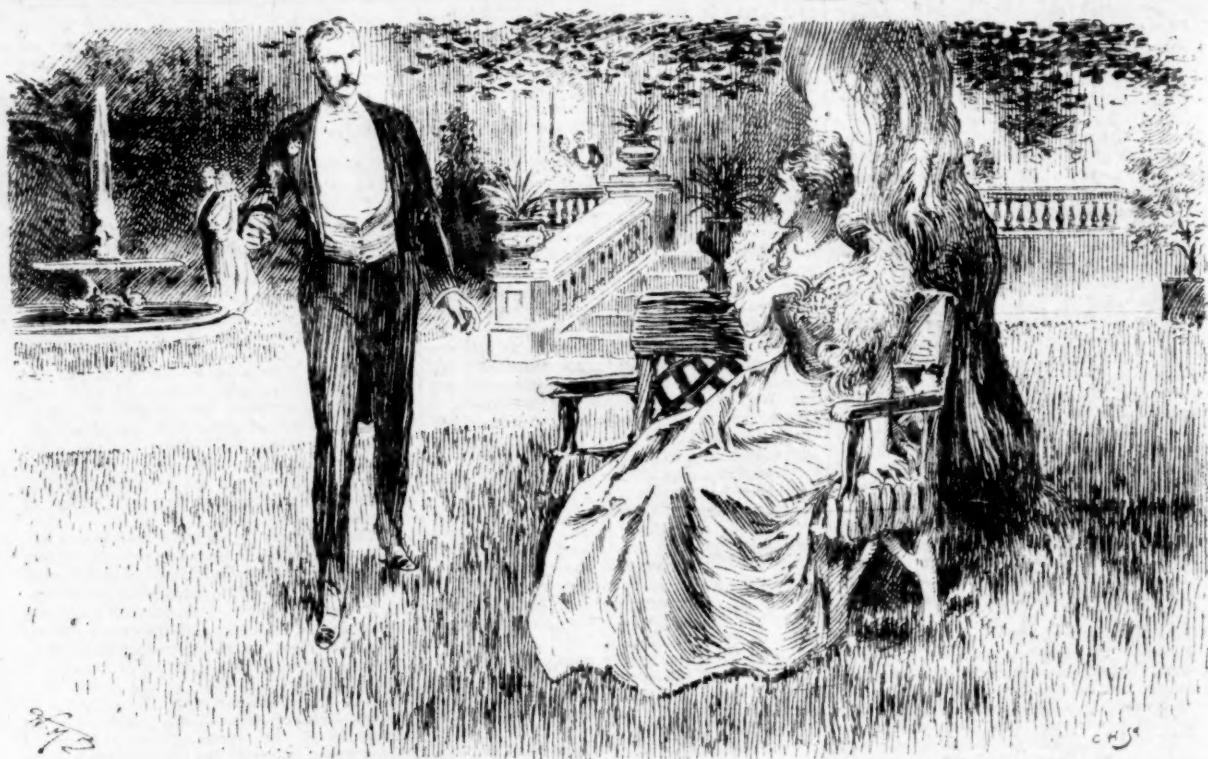
"Have I indeed spoilt your life?" she said, very painlessly, although, strange contradiction!—at the self-same moment a thrill of deep, but instantly suppressed exultation ran through her veins at the thought of his love having been so strong. "I am grieved—most grieved."

He looked at her in silence—a frail shadowy figure in the moonlight, with the sweetest and truest of grey eyes—eyes that looked as if their clear depths had never known shadow of guile.

"What sphinx was ever half so difficult of comprehension as a woman!" he muttered under his breath. "I cannot understand the mystery—I suppose I never shall."

He came close to her, and laid a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Alicia!" he said, "tell me one thing. Heaven



"LADY CARLYON!" SAID COLONEL STUART, AS HE PAUSED. "YES, IT IS I!" SHE REPLIED.

only knows whether I have a right to ask it! Why did you leave my letters unanswered?"

She made no reply, but he could feel her form vibrating under his touch.

"Was it," he continued, after a moment's pause, "because you found you loved Sir Ascot Carlyon better than me, and you were not brave enough to encounter my anger at your fickleness? Better you had done so—far better than the miserable suspense I endured until I saw your marriage chronicled in the paper. Oh, Heaven! even now I cannot bear to look back upon it!"

The last words ended in a whisper, and his hand fell heavily from her arm. She turned and clasped it with her slim fingers.

"Don't think so harshly of me, Baill—judge me as leniently as you can. I dare not explain all, but, indeed, I am not to blame, as you suppose."

"Not to blame!" he repeated, shaking off her touch. "Not to blame, when you went on deluding me—when the very last time I saw you, you lay in my arms in the starlight, and said you loved me better than anything in the wide world, and that nothing, save death itself, would shake your constancy? It was the foulest lie that ever stained a woman's lips!"

"It was not!" she cried, strong beyond all endurance by her anguish. "It was true as Heaven's own truth—it is true still!"

There was that in her voice which vouches for what she said, and his heart gave a great wild bound as he heard it. Her face was deadly pale—as white as the lilies Albine had placed in the bosom of her black lace dress; but in her deep eyes glowed the same terrible anguish her voice expressed, and which admitted but of one interpretation.

He waited a moment, while she sank down on the chair from which she had risen in her excitement, and buried her face in her hands.

From a distance came the echoes of merry laughter; Hubert and his guests had wandered off into the plantation, and, tempted by the beauty of the night, were in no hurry to ex-

change it for the drawing-room; but there was no one near enough to see or hear the two beneath the copper bough—practically they were as utterly alone as if they had been in a room with closed doors.

"It seems to me you have either said too much or too little," Colonel Stuart added; "enough to rouse my suspicion that treachery has been at work, and not enough to satisfy them. Besides, you have not answered my question. You have not told me why you did not answer my letters!"

"Because I never had them!" she answered, in desperation. "Now are you satisfied—now do you see why your condemnation is unjust? I have said more than I had any right to say, but you have forced me to it by your hardness—"

He interrupted her with scant ceremony.

"Then it was not for love you married Sir Ascot?"

"No."

"Nor for the sake of his title?"

"A thousand times, no."

"I begin to see it all now," he said, drawing a deep breath, while his thoughts took a retrospective sweep over the past, and Alicia once more appeared before his eyes as he saw her then—a sweet, innocent, trustful girl, who had plighted him her troth in spite of the opposition of her ambitious mother.

He had loved her with all the strength of his nature—had woven round her all his tenderest fancies, had endowed her with all beautiful womanly attributes and his disappointment when she wedded Sir Ascot Carlyon had been such as it falls to few men's lot to suffer.

As the years went by he fancied he had become cold and hardened, and that his heart was steeled against all the siren fascination a woman could exercise. He had even courted a meeting with his former love, in order to prove that Alicia Howard no longer existed in Alicia, Lady Carlyon, and—this was the result!

Instead of a heartless coquette, triumphant in her beauty, and her position as the wife of a man

of high rank and noble name, there sat before him a humbled, crushed creature, clothed with all her old gentleness, and with a ring in her voice whose meanings he recognised only too well.

There was no need for him to ask, or for her to give further explanation. It seemed to him he understood everything, and he cursed his own blind folly for condemning her, and for believing the letter her mother wrote, sending him back his ring, and telling him that her daughter no longer cared for him. Of that he could not speak, for the hands that had traced those lines were now held tight in death's cold embrace, and his lips were sealed from uttering reproaches against her.

"I see it all now—my poor Alicia!" he said; "and it is a thousandfold worse than I thought it. I don't know which to pity most—you or myself!"

For the knowledge had come to him that not one life, but two, had been ruined by that mysterious fate against whose decrees we have no power to wrestle.

(To be continued.)

THE Ameer of Afghanistan is getting stout, and the doctors have ordered him to take gentle exercise. But the Ameer intends to carry out the orders with as little discomfort to himself as possible, judging from the carriage that has been built for him in London. The bulk of the propulsion of the vehicle will be done by two stalwart Afghans, who will pedal behind their sovereign and receive their orders through an unglazed window. When his Highness feels inclined he can assist in the work by pedalling two footboards. He can do all this while lounging on silk cushions and enjoying a smoke. Besides the carriage for his personal use, the Ameer has had another built for the use of members of his harem.



"YOU NEEDN'T HAVE COME TO SPY ON ME!" HUGH SAID, HOARSELY, AS HE LEANED AGAINST THE DOOR-POST.

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEVER ANOTHER !

LORD WENTWORTH came down to luncheon, and showed no sign of outward agitation, except by the excessive pallor of his cheeks, which almost matched his silken hair in whiteness. He asked if Sibyl had enjoyed herself at the dance, and endeavoured to show, by repeated questions, that in spite of his own anxieties he had still a kindly interest in her doings. She felt as if she could not talk about such frivolities, when she knew that his thoughts must be far away with his son in India ; but Hugh helped on the conversation, and even brought a smile to Lord Wentworth's lips by a grotesque description of "The Masher."

"I suppose we ought to have him over here some day," he said, musingly. "His father and I were rather life-long acquaintances than friends, though we were boys together at Eton. Your father, Hugh, was a great chum of Windsor's, and he paid him for his affection by a rascally trick."

"What was it? I should like to have had the chance of kicking him."

"You can't kick a man in his coffin, and I don't know if I have a right to rake up an old scandal. May I trouble you to pass the claret?"

Hugh got up politely, and filled the Viscount's glass, as the servants were always allowed to depart after the first beginning of luncheon, and after changing Sibyl's plate, helped himself to some Silton. "I thought Lady Windsor seemed to take me for a lunatic," he said, presently. "She did nothing but stare at me for a good half-hour."

"No doubt she was tracing a likeness to your father—she was in love with him long ago, and Windsor came between them."

"Why did my father bear it? Did he know ?

I should like to have broken every bone in his body!" the boy's eyes flashing.

"He did not know it for many years—"

"Well, and what did he do?" with great eagerness.

"He died," in a low voice of exceeding pain. "I was with him at the time."

"But I thought he was killed out shooting," his mournful eyes opened with horror. "Surely it was an accident, nothing more?"

"The verdict was one of accidental death, and no one quarrelled with it; but some of us thought that if he had not been tired of life, he wouldn't have been so careless. Poor fellow! I never liked Windsor after that, and when he asked leave to come to the funeral I gave him the hint that he had better stay away. Your mother knew nothing of it, poor soul, because Macdonald made her the kindest of husbands."

"But why did he marry her?" asked Sibyl, who had been listening with the greatest interest.

"He liked her well enough, and she was a beautiful woman. She belonged to one of the old Castilian families, but through some political scrape her father lost his fortune, and she was reduced to great poverty. He had always a chivalrous nature, and beauty in misfortune had special charms for him. He married her over there, and I remember well what a sensation she made, and how proud he was of his young bride."

"And yet he never loved her," objected Hugh, feeling that his beautiful mother had been basely treated.

"He did what he could for her, and made her as happy as possible. She never knew of his love for Eleanor Vansittart, so was disturbed by no pangs of jealousy."

"But it was a fraud from the beginning."

"I don't see it. Not one man out of a hundred marries his first love; and if he does he is often terribly disappointed. In our youth we exalt the one woman we admire most into a goddess, and surround her with the loveliest

of illusions; but as we grow older we find she is not absolutely faultless, and grumble because she is mortal."

"I should not like her to have no faults, but I can fancy thinking her faults nicer than anyone else's," said Hugh, dreamily.

"Yes, my dear boy; you would go the end of the tether, and be capable of any insanity," said the old man, with a smile; "but the wisest way is never to give the whole heart, so as always to have a place in reserve."

"I shouldn't like that," said Sibyl, promptly.

"But who will give you more, in spite of protestations?"

"I don't know," looking down shyly at her plate.

"And when you marry, do you think one image will fill your heart to the exclusion of everyone else?" looking at her in grave surprise.

A wave of crimson flooded cheek and brow, as she turned her head away without a word. Hugh having seen the guilty blush, and drawing his own conclusions, answered for her: "Depends upon the bridegroom."

"That, I believe, is already settled," said Lord Wentworth, with a glance of reproof, for he was afraid lest the careless speech might hurt a young girl's feelings.

Hugh pushed back his chair, then waited courteously for Sibyl to make the first move. As soon as she got up he walked out of the room, and left them alone. She walked round the table, and put her hand on the back of Lord Wentworth's chair.

"You think a marriage may be happy without an immense amount of love on both sides!" she said, timidly.

"Infinitely happier, as a rule; for there are fewer illusions to dispel, and in many cases they receive their death-blow in the honeymoon."

He took her hand and patted it kindly.

"Don't let yourself be led away by the romantic talk of a boy like Hugh; believe me, the happiest path in life is the most prosaic."

Was matrimony, with Major Lushington for

one of the parties concerned, to be called prosaics ! she wondered to herself as she sat down on her favourite low-chair in the library.

Hugh, who was lounging on the sofa, heaved a deep sigh.

"What is the matter ?" looking round over her shoulder.

"I was thinking of my mother," in a low voice. "Fancy what she must have suffered, and no one guessed it !"

"But perhaps she did not know."

"Not know ! when she was devoted to my father, everyone says that. Of course she wouldn't bzzon it about, but she knew it. Trust a woman for that, if she has a heart at all !"

"They were very happy, Lord Wentworth says so."

"Because women like her know how to smile when their hearts are breaking. I have always felt there was a curse upon me, and now I know why. I see it all as clearly as if they had told me. They went on a visit to the Court, my father suspecting nothing. When there, he found out that he had been cheated by his friend—that his first love had been true to him even when she married against her will—and the sequel you can guess. Don't you know ? Can't you guess ? He went home and shot himself !"

He covered his face with his hands, and his chest heaved.

"But it was an accident—Indeed, it was !" her heart full of the truest sympathy.

"I was a child at the time," he said, hoarsely, "and I didn't understand ; but I remember the servants talking and whispering at the end of the nursery, and someone said that the gun was not loaded with common shot."

She leant forward and took his hand, (not knowing what to say).

"Pleasant thing for my mother !" he broke out, after a miserable pause. "He would rather die than live with her ! Can't you fancy what she felt when they brought him home, and she knew the truth ?"

"But she can't have known it ! It would be too terrible !"

"There was a little miniature in his pocket, set round with pearls—the face was Elinor Van-dittrit's—and when she saw it she must have known that his life for the last few years had been a lie. Poor thing !" in a voice of intense feeling ; "and I was a boy and knew nothing !"

"Did you know that Elinor Van-dittrit was Lady Windsor ?"

"No ; I thought I knew her face, and puzzled over it. She asked me to go over there, but how can I ?"

"Why not ? Lord Windsor is dead !"

"Yes, but his son is of the same blood."

"That is nothing ! Would you hate me if my poor father had done a wrong to yours ?"

"I should wish to. But you wouldn't let such a thing as this divide us !" suddenly fixing his large eyes on her face.

"No ; why should it ? I am so intensely sorry for you !"

"And you will like me all the same, in spite of ?" his lips trembling.

"Not all the same, but a thousandfold the better !" she answered, warmly, out of the depths of her compassion.

He raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it fervently.

"You are an angel !"

"Youth is the age of illusions !" she quoted, with a smile.

"Yes, but there are illusions which last till death. I could stake everything belonging to me that when you kiss me before I die you will seem to me as far above others as you do now !"

"Don't talk of death !" she said, with a shiver. "When it comes we may be in different quarters of the globe."

"No, we shan't be that," in a tone of quiet conviction. "If I had my choice, I would die now, just as we are, with your little hand in mine."

She drew it away with a pang of superstitions fear, as if she thought the wish could bring its fulfilment.

"What has become of all your fine visions of being of service to Mr. Wentworth ?"

"Gone !" he said, hopelessly.

"You must distinguish yourself somehow. I want to be proud of you !"

"Should you care a straw ?"

"Yes, a great many ! Do something great, that I may say with pride, 'Mr. Macdonald ! I know him better than anyone else. We used to be like brother and sister !'

He stood up behind her and looked down at her pretty brown curly hair, as her head rested against the back of her chair. Surely they arranged themselves more daintily and prettily than the ordinary half of other people !

"I will try to deserve the name !" he said, sadly. Then he knelt down, and keeping his arm round the top of the chair, so as almost to seem like a cross, he bent over her with wistful eyes.

"Will there never be any other ?"

She raised her eyes to the beautiful face, but a few short inches from her own, and the tears gathered on her lashes. In it she saw such a fatal capacity for passion and pain. If he loved, he would love with his whole heart and soul, there would not be the smallest fragment kept in reserve, and such love in its madness brings its own reward. He was sure to suffer ; but must here be the first hand to give him a stab ?

"Don't ask, or you will spoil it all !" she said, entreatingly.

A gleam of joy passed over the sorrow in his face. "I won't ask, but I can wait !"

"There is nothing to wait for !" hastily, fearing lest he had misunderstood.

"I was so terribly down at the mouth, and this hope is a godsend."

"There is no hope—only from this day forth we are to be the best of friends, and you shall tell me your troubles, and I'll pour out a bairge of mine."

"Begin at once !" pulling a stool towards him, to serve as a seat. "How about Lushington ?"

"Mind, not a word to anyone else !" holding up her finger, pleased to see the look of despair had already left his face. "I don't know that I ought to tell you ; but I am so tired of keeping it all to myself !" with a little sigh, "and you are only a boy, you know."

"A year older than yourself," he put in, quietly.

"Yes ; but I must look upon you as a boy—unless you want me to call you Mr. Macdonald, and to keep it all to myself !" with an air of inquiry.

"Call me a baby—a long-clothed baby—if you like !"

"Only then it would be no use. Well, listen ;" as he was already doing so with all his ear, "this remark was unnecessary. "Last summer, for the first time in my life, I went to stay with Colonel and Mrs. Hay at Woolwich, and from that visit all my troubles date. I enjoyed it very much—too much, perhaps. The Hays were very good to me, and Major Lushington—"

"His lordship wished to speak to Mr. Macdonald," said Landon's voice at the door.

"Very well, tell him I'll come at once," and though he would have given anything to stay, he scrambled to his feet, with apparent alacrity, for Lord Wentworth must never be kept waiting. "Hard lines to be interrupted just now," he said, regretfully.

"Perhaps it is a good thing," said Sibyl, philosophically, as she had begun to be afraid of her promised confidence.

thought of it !" her cheeks losing their colour at the mere thought of what the news might be. "I shan't be a minute putting on my hat."

Taking it for granted that a woman's minute means five, Sibyl was exact to the time she mentioned, and they started immediately. The air was fresh and cold, but there was a promise of spring in the green buds of the hedges, and half a fulment in the primroses that gamed every bank. Rain had fallen in the morning, and the cup of every flower held a glistening drop, to which the declining rays of the sun gave the radiance of an opal. The western sky was lighted by a crimson glory, and the whole landscape of green pasture-lands and beach-covered hills was transfigured into such beauty as Elinor must have worn, when neither sin nor sorrow had brought their clouds, and angels walked in the haunts of man. It seemed impossible to fear anything in the face of that hope-inspiring light ; and the two so young in years, so formed for happiness, walked with light steps along the sunlit road, and, in spite of the anxiety in their hearts, laughed and chatted as they went.

"I wonder Lushington hasn't come back," said Hugh, looking over the hedge at a couple of horsemen wending their way homewards up the hill. "Don't you think you could tell me all about it now ?"

"Certainly not, the high-road is not the place for confidences ; and, Hugh, I just wanted to tell you," her face seeming to borrow some of the rosy hue of the sunset as she came to an abrupt stop.

"I am listening, pray go on," fixing his eyes upon her in a way that did not tend to lessen her embarrassment.

"I wish you wouldn't stare so !" with a little laugh.

"Is that all ?" carefully removing his glance to the mud at his feet, though a thoroughly English boy would probably have stared all the longer out of pure mischief. "I really thought something was coming."

"And so it is," with great gravity. "Do you know I have been thinking seriously about last night ?"

"And so have I."

"Nonsense, you haven't an idea what I mean. I never like to own myself in the wrong, but I'm not quite sure," lowering her voice so much that he had to come very close to hear what she said. "I mean, I think, perhaps, that people who knew nothing about me might have thought that I was flirting."

"Not a doubt of it," he said, unexpectedly. "How dare you say so !" looking up at him in breathless indignation.

"Of course, only the people who knew nothing about you," with a grave bow, although a smile lurked about the corners of his mouth."

"Yes, so it really didn't matter, and for the future I'm going to turn over a new leaf."

"But supposing we all prefer the other side of the page."

"Then you mustn't have it. I am going to alter my manner completely, and I shall never dance more than twice with any man," with great decision.

"Thank heaven, I'm a boy ; you said so yourself," he added, quickly, as if expecting a contradiction.

"Yes ; but you have a most objectionable habit of talking like a man. In the library just now," the blush returning, "I should have snubbed you much more, but of course it was all nonsense."

No answer.

"It was all nonsense, say so at once, or else—"

"Else what ?" looking round with an air of grave inquiry.

"I shall treat you as stiffly as I mean to do everyone else."

"Then it was nonsense—the most egregious stuff that ever was. I only said it to make you laugh," he asserted earnestly.

"Of course, I knew you did," with some dignity.

"Then, after all, I am to have the other side of the page !" with a gleam of amusement in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

"WOULD you like to come down to the station for a walk, or are you too tired ?" said Hugh Macdonald, about half-an-hour later, putting his head in at the library-door.

"Not a bit. I should like a breath of fresh air," and Sibyl rose from her chair with evident willingness. "But what are you going to the station for ?"

"The *Globe*. Uncle is dying to have it, to see if there is any news."

"Of course. How strange that I never

"I never said so, but I shall still call you Hugh."

"Thanks, I never mean to be a day older. Hello, I wonder what's up?" They were walking up the short hill which led to the station, as he spoke, and his exclamation was caused by the sight of George, the Wentworth's groom, holding Acorn and his own horse, whilst there was another groom, whom he did not recognise, in charge of two other horses.

"How tiresome! I would much rather walk home quietly with you!"

"So you shall. Major Lushington inside!" he asked the groom as he passed.

"Yes, sir!" touching his hat, "in the telegraph-office with Lord Windsor."

"All right, they won't see us. We can get the *Globe* and wait on the platform till the coast is clear." They walked quickly through the station, which was unusually full of people, all talking together in groups, and reached the platform. Hugh went up to the book-stall to ask for the paper, and Sibel remained a few steps behind, as there were several men in front of it. Not wishing to be noticed she turned her face to the wall, intending to study an advertisement, but found herself opposite the open window of the telegraph-office, inside which were two gentlemen whom she instantly recognised. She drew back hastily lest they should see her, but her retreat was cut off by a large basket of primroses which had been gathered from the neighbouring fields, and were destined for the London streets. She was looking at the primroses, and fancying what a pitiful change it would be for them from their peaceful birthplace amongst the dewy grass to the dust and dirt of the streets, when she heard Lord Windsor's voice say: "Well, wire him by all means, but the last person she wants is her husband."

"Don't care!" said the Major, shortly, "he must come, no other man will do."

"Why not yourself?"

"I—I—couldn't do it," as if staggered by the question.

"Not my 'air, but when the poor thing's dying!" with an evident shug of his shoulders.

"I can't help it. I wouldn't have it known for the world!"

"Deuced awkward! Everard was on the spot, you see!"

"What the deuce has that to do with it?" in a tone of the greatest exasperation.

"Only he heard the scream. 'Harold' should have been Jack or Tom if you mean to be up to larks!"

"Look here, Windsor," dropping his voice to a whisper.

Sibel stood rooted to the spot for a minute, than waking to the consciousness that she was hearing something which was certainly not intended for her ears, started forward, nearly tumbling over the basket. Just then Hugh came up with the *Globe* in his hand.

"No news from India; but something awful happened this afternoon. A lady was thrown from her horse and nearly done for!"

"Who was it?" curiosity running in front of sympathy.

"A stranger. You won't know her name. It's very horrible!" shuddering as he thought of the ghastly details he had just been told.

"Won't she get better?" in an awestruck whisper.

"Not a chance of it, they say. Let's get away from all these people," and he led her past the little knots of hunting men to a quiet end of the platform.

Captain Everard raised his hat, and looked after Sibel with a meditative gaze, then turned to a brother officer.

"Poor Laura Delamere was his first, and they say that's his last!"

"She's a thousand times too good for any of them," said Major Belfield, with his cigar in his mouth; "but, from what I saw last night, I'll back Windsor."

The Masher was only making the running, whilst t'other man got to the post. By Jove, there they go!" as he caught sight of Lord Windsor and Major Lushington riding down the

hill. "What'll you bet that he doesn't go to Crawshay's Farm before night?"

"Anything, if the other little girl's at the Chestnuts."

"But he ought, you know."

"But he won't, you know. Come and have a B. and S."

They strolled off to the refreshment-bar, whilst Hugh and Sibel went through a little white gate and down a narrow path which took them into the high road. Those whom they wished to avoid were out of sight by this time, so they walked at a brisk pace, remembering Lord Wentworth's anxiety for the paper.

Sibel was very thoughtful and said but little, her thoughts continually running on the conversation she had overheard.

What was the connection between Major Lushington and this unfortunate lady, that even Lord Windsor told him it was his duty to go to her? What could it be? She wondered if Hugh knew anything about it.

"What was her name?" she asked, presently, as they turned into the gates of the Chestnuts.

"Mrs. Springfield! But some of the men who seemed to know all about her spoke of her as Laura—I forgot the other name."

"And was she quite alone?"

"She put up at the 'Bull Inn,' with her horses and grooms. Her husband wasn't with her, I know that, and she only came down for the last meet of the season."

"But why did she want to hunt with our pack?"

"Some special attraction, somebody said, but I dare say it was all gossip," he added, hastily. "It seems such an awful shame to rake up old stories against a woman on her death-bed."

"I suppose she has a doctor and everything she wants?"

"Yes, Captain Everard galloped off for Seymour, and since then they telegraphed for Sir William Bell, but I believe it's a regular smash-up, and nothing can be done. Horrible! Isn't it?" with another shudder, "and they say she was beautiful."

Major Lushington was standing on the steps with *Globe* under his arm, as he drew off his riding-gloves.

"I see you have got it. I made a point of going round by the station because I knew Lord Wentworth would be glad to have it. How are you?" taking Sibel's hand, and looking eagerly into her face. "None the worse for last night? I don't think you look up to much."

"I have been dreadfully shocked—"

"Yes, horrible, wasn't it? Don't let us talk about it. I'm so thankful you weren't there."

"Yes," said Hugh, slowly, "I think you ought to be."

The Major gave him a sharp glance over Sibel's head.

"I am, because it was a ghastly sight, and enough to try the nerves of any man. A woman must have fainted. And then we should have had two on our hands instead of one."

"Did you help to carry her?" said Sibel, in a low voice, as she went into the library.

Major Lushington stooped to pick up one of his gloves before he answered.

"Yes, with several others, it seemed inhuman not to offer."

"Why shouldn't you?" raising her serious eyes to his.

He did not meet them, but looked straight into the fire.

"I'm not a good hand at that sort of thing, and I would rather face a battle-field than a woman in pain."

Sibel looked round the room to see if they were alone. Finding that Hugh had gone upstairs with the paper, she said quietly—

"You knew her, I think?"

He started violently.

"MacDonald has put you up to this!" he said, fiercely.

"He has not said a word about it," drawing herself up with youthful dignity. "Only I happened to be at the station this afternoon, when you were telegraphing to her husband."

"A stranger might do that; but I did know her, as a matter of fact—years ago—and very

slightly," frowning hard, as if the recollection were intensely painful. There was a long pause. His thoughts were dark and gloomy enough, to guess by his face, and it was some time before he spoke.

"I have to leave you to-morrow by the first train—awful shame—I'm dreadfully cut up about it."

"I thought you had a fortnight's leave?" looking up at him in surprise.

"I hoped so," he said, looking rather confused; "but, you see, a lot of fellows all wanted to go home at the same time."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Nobody seemed intensely grieved when Major Lushington announced his approaching departure. Lord Wentworth politely regretted it; Hugh seemed astonished at it; and Sibel appeared to bear up wonderfully under the shock. She noticed at dinner that the artilleryman's face was unusually pale, and his hand shook as he raised his glass of claret to his lips, as if he were thoroughly unshaken by the events of the day. During the evening she could not complain of his neglect, but a subtle change came over his manner. He was polite and attentive, anxious to place a footstool, hand her cup of tea, or turn over the leaves of her music; but all was done with an utter absence of tenderness or sentiment, as if some other memory had risen up suddenly between them, and he was still under the spell of some old association. When they parted for the night he promised to come back as soon as he could, and begged for constant letters; but as he omitted to suggest that she should come down at half-past seven to make his tea, she failed to see that it was her duty to do so. When seven struck she was wide awake, listening to every sound, and thinking of that other morning, when she got up in haste and repented at leisure.

There was no contrition in her heart, but a sense of boundless relief, when she tripped down the stairs at half-past nine, and found nobody but Hugh in the breakfast-room to greet her.

"When the cat's away the mice may play," he said, with a smile, as he threw a spray of stephanotis on to her plate.

"Do you suppose the cat would object?" taking up the white blossoms and fastening them in the front of her dress. "I have always heard that they are very indulgent to the mice until the final pounce."

"Yes, on the same principle as the convict's last breakfast. Nothing in the papers!" seeing that her eyes were fixed on the *Morning Post*. "It was only a false alarm."

"Then there will be no fighting!" waiting with her hand on the coffee-pot.

"Not for months—perhaps, not for years."

"Rather a good thing, isn't it?" with a deep sigh of relief.

"Yes, for my uncle," with a slight frown, for he hated to see her too much interested even in Dudley Wentworth.

"Have you heard anything of that poor Mrs. Springfield?"

"Only what George could tell me—and that wasn't much," he added, hastily, as he did not choose to inform her that Major Lushington had been riding with the unfortunate lady only five minutes before—that they parted in anger—"had sharp words," as the groom expressed it, and she put her horse at the ditch in a reckless manner, much as if she did not care whether she came to grief or not. Then came the crash, and she went down, and her horse over her. There was one scream—some said it was a gentleman's name; but when they ran to pick her up, she was quite still and seemed to know nothing. Her yellow hair was wet with blood from a cut on her forehead, and her right arm was doubled under her. "It was a sight to bring the water to any man's eyes," said George. "As to the Major, he shook like a leaf, as he tried to raise her up, and I didn't blame him neither."

"Crawshay's Farm isn't very far off!"

"Not beyond an easy ride—about two miles from Craybridge Station."

"Don't you think it would be kind to go over there, and ask if the poor thing has everything she wants?"

Hugh looked doubtful, as he passed the toast. "She is sure to be well taken care of."

"I don't think so," regarding him with some surprise. "She seems to have no belongings, and even Major Lushington, who knew her a long while ago, has gone up to town without thinking of her."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yes, but it was very slightly, and of course he hadn't time to do anything for her. Do ask me if we may have Acorn and May Queen at half-past eleven."

"Acorn had a long day yesterday."

"Then you could have the colt. I never knew you make a difficulty before."

He looked at her with his winning smile.

"Of course if you wish to go, you shall."

"I do wish to go. Fancy what I should feel if I were very ill at a strange farmhouse, and no one would come to me!" her eyes filling with tears in her vivid sympathy.

"You would never be alone, that I can promise," said Hugh, in his deep voice, which seemed to give double force to his words. "I will run up and tell my uncle."

Lord Wentworth, who had been thinking much of the unfortunate lady, entirely approved of the project, and sent a message to the effect that he placed everything belonging to him at her disposal, even going so far as to offer her a bed at the Chestnut, if the doctor would allow her to be moved.

"But perhaps she is not the sort of person you would like to have," said Hugh, hesitatingly.

"My dear boy, this is no time to ask what she has been."

"I was only thinking of Miss Fitzgerald," the blood rushing to his face.

"The noblest ladies in Rome wash the feet of beggars at certain seasons, and receive no soil, although the feet may have trodden in every path of vice. Let us do our duty, and not ask if others are doing theirs. That is the way, my boy, to go through life. And you are the last fellow to quarrel at mercy to a woman," with a kindly smile.

"I know nothing against her, and I shall be only too glad to go—only—"

"Never mind the 'only.' Order the horses, and start in good time. I shall be down to luncheon. Did any one get up to see the Major off?"

"Not a soul!" with an air of triumph.

"Indeed! I suppose Miss Fitzgerald over-slept herself!"

"I did not hear her say so," with a slight smile.

"Oblige me by ringing the bell."

Landau was summoned, and Hugh departed to the stables.

It was a lovely morning for a ride, rather warmer than the day before, and the air seemed to have the real breath of spring in its laughing lips as it played round the budding thorns.

"Do you know, Hugh, I must be the most heartless person alive!" and Sibyl looked round at him as he rode by her side. "We are going to ask after a person who is dying, and yet I absolutely can't feel in low spirits. The sun is so bright, the air so delicious, and May Queen is such a darling," patting her glossy neck, "that I feel inclined to raise up my voice and shout."

"Uncle felt the same, I believe," said Hugh, whose penetration had discovered the real secret of her exultation. "You should have seen his face when I read out that negotiations had been resumed, and the chances of war had lessened."

"His only son!" in a low voice, as her heart seemed to quiver with the thought of what his danger would mean to the poor old man, who had no other joy in life.

"And I was an only son too—but there is nobody to lie awake thinking of me when I am away from home."

"How do you know? A sleepless night is not

the pleasantest thing to wish a friend, but I'll try to keep my eyes open for half-an-hour some night to oblige you. Is that the Crawshays over there?" pointing with the handle of her whip to a group of red chimneys peeping between the tops of the trees, at the foot of a grassy hill.

"Yes, and the accident happened down by the ditch," nodding towards a ploughed field on the right-hand side of the road. "It was a long way to carry her on a hurdle, but the poor thing knew nothing about it, for she was in a dead faint."

Sibyl shuddered, and remained silent and grave for the rest of the way, picturing the scene just as it must have happened only the day before—the hounds in full cry tearing over the soft brown earth, the huntsman, whip, and a few of the first flight close on their heels, the stragglers coming up one after the other, in the midst of them a girl with the sun shining on her yellow hair, that nasty ditch with the hedge beyond, several got over all right and galloped away; but one was down amongst the briars, with her horse crushing the life out of her frail body.

She fancied how some pulled up their horses and came to see, grumbling perhaps at losing the run, till they found that here was something more than a woman in a fainting fit, and ruddy faces grew white, as they saw the pretty yellow hair red with blood. The horse had to be got away before they could touch her, and she fancied how it would plunge and kick, in wild unreasoning terror with its murderous hoofs coming dangerously near to that small golden head on the trampled grass.

The picture came so vividly before her, that she saw nothing else, and was surprised to find that they had entered the gate, and were within a hundred yards of the farm.

It was a red-brick building, with gabled windows on either side of the front door, and a roof half-covered with the large leafed ivy.

A window on the second floor, just above their heads, was open, and the blind, which was drawn down to its utmost extent, flapped with an irritating noise against a box of crocuses on the sill.

Outside there was the glory of the "sunshine, the budding life of fruit and flower, the song of the birds, the buzzing of insects actively searching for the honey of the freshly-opened petals. Inside there was the dimness of a darkened room, the hush of coming death, an earthly passions ceased their strife, and earthly longings were crushed by that knell of despair—too late!"

A fly was at the door; it moved away as the horses came in sight, and waited at a little distance.

"I should think the doctor was here. Shall I get down and reconnoitre?"

Sibyl nodded, feeling so strangely moved that she could not speak. George came forward to hold Acorn, and Hugh went up the steps and listened, not liking to use the knocker. The door was open, and as he stood on the mat the stairs were straight in front of him. Someone was coming down, but the hall seemed so dark after the brightness of the sunshine that he could not see clearly who it was.

The man picked up his hat from the stand in the hall, pulled it down over his eyes, and looked up.

Hugh wished himself anywhere at the moment as he saw Major Lushington standing before him, his face haggard and white as death, his eyes full of tears. He looked over the boy's shoulder to the girl's face beyond.

"You needn't have come to spy on me!" he said, hoarsely, as he leant his back against the doorpost.

(To be continued.)

THE most extraordinary forest in the world was discovered by Dr. Welwitsch, and occupies a tableland some six miles in width, near the west coast of Africa. The peculiarity of the trees is that, though their trunks are as much as four feet in diameter, they attain the height of only a foot. No tree bears more than two leaves, and these attain a length of six and a breadth of two feet.

THE MISTRESS OF THE MANOR.

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(Continued from page 120.)

It was a twelvemonth since the day that Maude Raymond had given the sprig of stephanotes to the artist, as they stood together amid the heliotrope and tea-roses in the lawyer's spacious conservatory.

Just a twelvemonth, and neither had caught a glimpse of the other since that time. Lester Dumont had left the old Manor House, and gone no one knew whither. But Mrs. Dent was not doomed to solitude again for so long; for within a fortnight of the artist's departure, Maude Raymond had declared her intention of passing some months amid scenes rendered sweet and yet sad to her at one and the same time.

Sweet, inasmuch that the presence of their late occupier seemed ever present with her as she sat with her work and books in the very room where, she learnt from Mrs. Dent, the greater part of his time had been passed, even though he had been urged by her (the house-keeper) to choose a more lively aspect.

Sad, inasmuch as that the thought was as ever prevailing as his presence that he could never be more to her than a casual acquaintance. Had he himself not said it? But did not his manner, his words, imply that he wished it otherwise? Ay! there lay the secret sorrow and bitterness!

The "might have been" had crept into the girl's life, and she felt it in every pulse. Still it was something to be amid scenes rendered dearer to her since they spoke so constantly of him to her.

The days passed away.

Spring, summer, autumn, and still the beautiful heiress remained on, living her secluded life, notwithstanding all Mrs. Ellis's arguments that society would do her good. But she only smiled sadly, and said that she cared no more for the balls and parties of which she had once been the belle. She had no spirit left within her, and daily grew paler and paler, much to the consternation of those around her.

It was, as I have before remarked, just a twelvemonth from the time when she had last met Lester Dumont, and she was thinking of him deeply as she sat down in the "haunted" room, and glanced round upon the oaken wainscot.

"How I should like to see him once again!" she murmured, as her dark eyes continued to wander idly round the room.

Suddenly she started from her seat, and made her way with quick, noiseless steps to a corner of the room where stood an old oaken table. It had been much admired by the artist, Mrs. Dent had told her, and he had always used it to put his letters and papers away in, for there were drawers in it—old-fashioned drawers, with little brass handles to draw them out with.

The girl's first action, when she reached the table, was to bend her beautiful face down to it and lay her lips lovingly on the cold, senseless wood. Her next to quietly draw out the drawer nearest to her.

Nothing in it but a few clippings of cardboard. Closing it again she turned to the other, and opened it. Quite at the back of the drawer lay a something which gleamed white against the black wood. Putting it in one hand she carefully drew forth the same, and then, crossing to the hearth, she knelt down before the blazing fire to inspect her treasure.

It was a photograph of a young girl! The colour rushed to her face as she recognized it for the same as the one she had seen in Lester Dumont's portfolio—just a year ago!

Long did she gaze at the fair, smiling face, which smiled up at her, while sad and regretful feelings surged through her brain, and a great longing arose in her heart.

"And this is the woman who has secured the prize for which I so long!" she murmured at length, as she arose and restored the laughing face to its former dark corner. Then reclosing the drawer with a deep sigh, she threw herself

on a neighbouring couch, and gave vent to her feelings in a perfect flood of tears.

The night that followed was bright, clear, and frosty, on which every sound broke distinctly on the rarefied atmosphere. Mrs. Dent, the housekeeper, felt very restless. She turned and turned, hoping to thus gain sleep, but all to no purpose. The more she tossed and turned the more restless she became.

And then such thoughts would flash across her brain, the dismal tale connected with the Manor House first and foremost. And then—

What was that?

Mrs. Dent sat bolt upright in bed, and listened with all her might. The moonlight lit up her room distinctly. She glanced towards the door. That was as she had left it some hours before—closed.

She sat still, scarce daring to breathe. Five minutes passed away; and then—the sound once more—a curious, swishing sound, as though someone or something were feeling their way along by passing a hand over the papered walls. Nearer and nearer it came.

Mrs. Dent could bear the suspense no longer. So, rising from her bed, and hastily putting her feet into her slippers, and throwing a light shawl around her, she stole on tip-toe to the door, quickly and noiselessly unfastened it, and looked forth along the long corridor to her right.

What she saw made her stagger for an instant, and a half-smothered exclamation of terror and alarm escaped her white and trembling lips.

Then a sudden impulse seized her, and she felt that she must follow the object so swiftly making its way down the dark corridor, and of which she could catch but the dim outline.

So, keeping well against the wall, she proceeded to walk with silent and noiseless steps. On and on went the object; and on and on followed the housekeeper till she found herself in the "haunted" chamber!

There was the ghost who, with noiseless footsteps, advanced to the fireplace.

Another instant, and the oak panel flew back, while a strong current of damp air was wafted across the room, and threw aside the light shawl which the housekeeper had thrown around her.

One corner of the same was lifted high over her head in such a manner as to obscure and obstruct her gaze for an instant.

When she had removed it, the figure had disappeared, and the panel was again in its place.

Still, acting under the impulse, the housekeeper crept cautiously forth from her dark corner, and advanced into the full light of the bright moonlight and made her way towards the sliding panel.

It yielded to the pressure of her finger, and again the strong current of damp air ascended and filled the room.

But here all was dark. No sign of the ghost met her gaze.

Only after a few seconds' waiting in great fright and trepidation, and just as she was about to turn away to secure a light, a sharp and piercing scream smote on her ear.

The next instant and she had fallen senseless on the floor, while the cold current still swept on past her from the staircase leading to the subterranean passage down which the ghost had disappeared.

"And you are quite sure, Lester, that you love me for myself alone?"

"Quite sure, my darling!" was the fond answer of the man who knelt at the side of the couch whereon lay the beautiful heiress and owner of the Manor House.

"And now tell me all about it once again! It will not tire me, and I want to hear your voice, so that I may know you are here—really yourself, and not your ghost that I forgot. I must never use that word again, since poor Mrs. Dent was so frightened by seeing the—"

"Most beautiful ghost that it was ever any one's fate to behold!" was added by the fond

lover, as he lowered his lips to the sweet red ones that were temptingly near his own.

"No more flattery, sir; but please tell me all about it once again!"

"I obey, fair queen! You see I had with me at Edar's Farm an unfinished sketch of the old Manor House as viewed by moonlight. I longed to complete it, so I returned here yesterday for that purpose. I put up at the inn, and, after supper, made my way to the rustic bridge. It was then a quarter to ten by my watch. I placed my easel, and taking my palette, prepared to catch the moonlight effect as it brought into broad relief the stately grey pile. I worked on steadily for about two hours, when I was suddenly startled by a something white bearing down on the beach avenue. It drew nearer and nearer, till, with an unearthly scream, it disappeared behind a clump of thick bushes. I laughed softly to myself for having been so scared by a poor, harmless white owl, and sat down again to resume my painting. Just then the stable-clock struck the hour of midnight. As the last deep note died away a figure rose, as from the earth, and stood at my side. I must confess I felt frightened. Still, I had courage enough left to touch the white hand near me, and then I quickly discovered that it belonged not to the spirit world. I took the fair fingers within my own, and then looked steadily up into the face of my fair visitor. Ah! how can I describe the emotion that thrilled me as I recognized the dear features of the only woman that I cared for on the whole earth! I gently spoke the word 'Maude!' The dark eyes brightened with returning consciousness, the senses threw away the numbing influence of profound sleep, and with the sudden cry of fright that issued from your lips, I caught you in my arms. I re-entered at the same instant the subterranean passage. It explained everything. You had fainted; so lifting you in my arms, I bore you swiftly to the entrance-door, and rang a loud peal for admission. Mrs. Ellis herself appeared. I stayed but to see you restored to consciousness, and then departed to collect my painting materials and return to the inn. I was here early this morning to make inquiries, and I will never leave you till you yourself speak the word that dismisses me."

"Claude, my love, my love!" was all the reply the beautiful heiress and owner of the Manor House bestowed on the handsome man at her side.

But it satisfied him. He knew by the depth of passion that rang in her voice, by the fast-filling eyes, that that word would never be spoken.

A blissful silence followed for a few instants. Then he spoke again,—

"But my darling, think of the sacrifice that you will have to make! This noble old pile!"

"My darling, I would give up all for the man I love!" was the low-spoken reply, as the girl glanced up lovingly with her dark eyes.

"My loving and noble-hearted girl! But such a sacrifice is not needed. No! learn now that in the artist Lester Dumont you see the Lester Frere mentioned in your father's will! You are not angry with me, darling, for practising a little harmless deceit! I so wanted to feel assured that my darling loved me for myself alone, and not for the sake of returning her ancestral home. You are not vexed, Maude, my darling!"

"Vexed, Lester, dear! How could I be! I loved you from the first moment that I saw you! and so it little matters whether you be Lester Dumont or Lester Frere. But you are sure you loved me for myself alone?"

"Quite, my darling!"

Another tiny spell of silence. Then she asked,—

"But the photograph, Lester?"

"What photograph, dear?"

"The one in your portfolio, and the one I found in the little oaken table down in the haunted room!"

A puzzled look was on Lester Frere's face for a few moments, then quickly vanished as he turned and laid his lips on the pretty ones at his side.

"It is that of a young lady who is about to be married to an old friend of mine. I met her in Germany, and by some accident the photo which I had sent me when she became engaged to Max must have slipped in between the sketches. That is all, dear! And now, when is it to be, darling?"

"When you like, Lester," was the reply.

"Then I shall ask Mrs. Ellis to arrange everything for a speedy wedding," replied Lester Frere, as he once again bent fondly over the beautiful girl whom he was so soon to call by the sacred and sweet name of wife!

A few weeks later and Lester Frere and his loving wife are welcomed warmly by his old friend Max, who, with his pretty Ellis do all in their power to render sweet and pleasant their stay in the dear old Fatherland.

Sometimes the fair bride's thoughts revert to the gipsy maiden's tale, and she speculates in secret (for Lester would so laugh at her, she feels assured) for her knowledge, and how it was obtained.

To us, the initiated, and who are allowed a peep behind the scenes, it is well-known that the gipsy maiden was hidden behind some dark shrubs, and from this point drank in eagerly every word of the sad tale told by Mrs. Dent to her young mistress!

[THE END.]

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

—10.—

CHAPTER L

HOW HE FOUND HER.

It is an evening in August, and seated waist-deep among the purple heather, and half hidden by clumps of golden gorse, we see, for the first time, the little heroine of our story.

She is an elf-like looking child.

Her blue eyes are so dark as to be nearly black; her tangled, uncombed hair floats round her head like a golden halo, as the rays of the setting sun rest upon and bathe it with some of their own departing splendour.

But the baby face, though beautiful in feature, is sadly dirty, while marks of tears stain the pale cheeks, as though her childish heart had already been wrung by something more than childish sorrow.

This little creature of two years old, famished with hunger and parched with thirst, had cried herself to sleep some hours earlier in the day when the sun was high in the heavens; and here among the heather on the Shirley Hills, she had slept the sleep of exhaustion, all through the burning August afternoon.

Stretched like a log by her side lay a woman, who even in her brightest days, could never have had a feature in common with the infant that apparently belonged to her.

The woman had fallen into a drunken slumber from which the child's cry fails to wake her, and the little one forgets her hunger for the moment as her eyes rest upon the purple flowers about her.

She had just clutched a handful of the heather when the sound of voices reminded her of her famished condition, and at the same time roused a forlorn hope in the baby breast that a good lusty yell might bring relief, and she forthwith did her very best.

Still, her cries did not wake the woman, who lay like a heap of dirty rags beside her, but it brought two other persons somewhat hurriedly to the spot.

"I knew it was the cry of a child," exclaimed a young man, with a glance at his companion—a girl some two or three years younger than himself.

Then he bent down towards the little creature and asked,—

"What is the matter, litt'le one? won't mother wake?"

"Elsie hungry," said the child, putting her hand to her mouth; "Elsie dreffal hungry."

"Oh! Lionel, pray don't touch the child," cried the young lady, in alarm; "you don't know but that you may catch a fever or even something worse. Come away, do; the woman will wake up soon, you may be sure. What a horrid thing she looks!"

But Lionel Denison did not heed the expostulation; he soothed the child by telling her she should have something to eat directly, and by giving her some bon-bons which he happened to have in his pocket. Then he turned his attention to the woman, who still lay silent and motionless—an ugly blotch upon the beauty of the heather.

He spoke to her first, but as this produced no effect he gently shook her.

She uttered no sound, however; and at last, despite his companion's protests, he took hold of her dirty wrist and tried to feel her pulse.

"I thought so," he said, letting the arm fall from his hand, "she is dead."

"Dead!" gasped the girl, with a shiver, "are you quite sure? Oh! this is too horrible."

"It is very, very sad," he replied, "particularly for this poor little thing, though," he added, with a quick glance from the dead woman to the living child, "I cannot believe that this was the child's mother."

"Most likely she was its grandmother," suggested Edith Grey, "she looks old enough; but do let us get away. I feel so upset that I don't know how I shall walk home, and what can we do with the child? Won't it be best to leave it till we can meet a policeman?"

"Leave it alone and hungry by the side of the dead!" exclaimed the young man, in a tone of angry surprise. "I shall certainly do nothing of the kind. Poor little creature, she shall go home with me until her friends can be found."

"And suppose she has no friends?" asked the girl, looking steadily and suspiciously at him.

"Then I will be a father to her," he replied, recklessly lifting the little one from the ground.

He had not meant to say this, and he had no serious intention at the moment of adopting the poor little human wif; but Edith and he had been very near a serious quarrel when the child's cry first reached them, and her words and manner irritated him now more than he cared to admit.

"If you adopt her you will lose me," said Edith, steadily, "so you may choose between us. I have no patience with such Quixotic absurdities."

He made no answer for the moment, and his face became very white, but he glanced first at the dead woman lying among the heather, then his eyes turned to the beautiful face of the girl who had promised to be his wife, and he was about to speak, when a little sob from the child nestling so trustfully in his arms touched the tenderest chord in one of the kindest hearts that ever beat in human breast.

"Poor, friendless, pretty, little thing!" was the thought that flashed through his brain. "If I were to forsake her I should deserve to be forsaken of Heaven in the hour of my utmost need."

Then he met the angry glances of his fiancée, and said quietly, though with decision,

"I shall take care of this little girl until someone who has a better right to do so claims her from me, whatever the consequences may be; and I shall be sorry if you disapprove of my doing so."

"So I should think!" was the disdainful retort. "Perhaps you would like me to take the clean little creature home with me?"

"No, thank you, my housekeeper will take every care of her," was the answer.

Then, with another glance at the dead woman, he walked away from the spot, carrying the sleeping child in his arms.

Edith Grey kept near him for a little while, wading through the thick heather, and spitefully kicking off as many of the blossoms as she

could until they came upon the high road; then she paused and said,—

"I am going straight home. You can send the police to look after that woman without me."

"Yes, thank you," he replied, courteously; "and I will do all I can to keep your name out of the matter, so that you may not be made uncomfortable by having to attend the inquest."

Then he lifted his hat, as he might have done to a mere casual acquaintance, while she bowed, and turned in the direction of her own home; and it was in this way that these two—who had promised each other that all their lives should be spent together—parted, and tacitly dissolved the compact between them.

It must not be supposed that the finding of this little child was the real or the only cause of the rupture.

For some time past the lovers had been slowly but surely drifting apart, and Edith had come out for a walk with Lionel this very evening, with the fixed determination in her mind either to have an early day fixed for their marriage, or to break off the engagement altogether.

There were many reasons for this which she would not have liked to hear anyone else define, the principal of them being, that when she accepted Lionel she believed him to be a much richer man than he really was; and recently a far more eligible personage, from her point of view, had come to reside in the neighbourhood, and Miss Edith thought she would have no difficulty in securing this desirable gentleman's affections if she were only free.

She was not altogether devoid of feeling, and, above all, she had a great respect for Mrs. Grundy's opinion, and was very anxious not to get the character of a heartless jilt; besides, she did love Lionel Denison as warmly as her cold, selfish nature was capable of loving anybody, and therefore this parting was a shock to herself as well as a blow to him.

"I am glad that I have done it," she thought, as she walked towards her mother's house. "He is full of crochets, and we never should have got along comfortably together. The idea of his taking that dirty little brat to his own house instead of letting it find a home in the workhouse, as anybody in his senses would have done! No reasonable man could suppose I would submit to such an infliction, but Lionel was always visionary and Quixotic to the last degree."

Her face was flushed, and her eyes were bright with excitement, and she certainly did look very attractive, as, turning a bend of the road, she met a young man of some one or two-and-thirty.

"'Tis well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new, but don't lose any time," she thought, as, with a bright smile of recognition, which still further increased the singular charm of her beauty, she greeted the new-comer; and, Mr. Hazlewood, taking her extended hand, remarked how agreeably surprised he was to meet her.

He did not say "alone," but his tone seemed to imply it; and Edith, glad of the opportunity to announce her freedom to the man whom she meant to be Lionel's successor, at once began a highly-coloured statement of how she and Mr. Denison had found the dirty child and the dead woman among the heather, and how he had declared his intention of adopting the little outcast.

"You know he is peculiar in a good many ways," she continued, in an apologetic tone, "and he has tried my patience so often that I have more than once felt that we were utterly unsuited to each other, but this last freak of his was too absurd. He might have paid someone to take care of the child; but to take her to his own house and adopt her is preposterous! Indeed, I spoke very strongly upon the subject to him."

"Naturally; and so you quarrelled?"

"No, we have not quarrelled; but we have parted," she replied, with languid indifference.

"Poor Denison!" said Hazlewood, in a tone which made Edith glance at him sharply.

But his face was turned away from her and she could not see its expression, nor could she feel sure whether her companion really pitied

her discarded lover, or despised him for ever having loved her.

"I don't know why you should say 'poor Denison!'" she replied, petulantly. "I don't suppose he considers himself in need of pity."

"The greater his misfortune," returned Mr. Hazlewood, lightly; "but one man's loss is often another's man's gain. By-the-way, what kind of a child is this one to which he has taken such a strange fancy?"

"I am sure I cannot tell you," was the answer. "It was such a mass of dirt and rage that I really could not touch it; and, in fact, I scarcely looked at its face. I am nervously afraid of fever and of the dreadful disorders which I am told these tramps always carry about with them; but though I did not take notice of the child, I could not help observing the singular appearance of the dead woman."

"Why? What was there about her that was peculiar?" asked the man, with sudden interest.

"Well, in the first place she was old—quite sixty, I should think."

"Is that all?"

"No; her features were sharp and thin, and very clearly cut, while the skin was brown as a berry, and tanned like parchment."

"Perhaps she was gipsy!" said Hazlewood carelessly.

"Oh! no, she was not at all of the Romany type, but her face was anything but a pleasant one to look at; and as I think of it now, with the thin lips drawn away from the white teeth, it makes me feel faint and giddy."

She certainly did look pale, and Hazlewood said, quickly,—

"Pray take my arm, Miss Grey, the shock has been too much for you; but do try to rouse yourself. Don't faint, for mercy's sake. I shall certainly bolt if you do."

He uttered this ludicrous threat in such a tone of desperation that she could not help giving a little hysterical laugh which reassured him, and he supported her to a grassy bank by the roadside, and suggested that she should remain here while he went to get a conveyance of some kind in which to take her home.

She told him it was unnecessary, however, and that she would be better directly; and after resting a few minutes she was sufficiently recovered to walk home, though she accepted his proffered arm and leaned somewhat heavily upon it.

Her mother, seeing her enter the grounds of their small domain, thus escorted, smiled with satisfaction, though she was sufficiently prudent not to let Mr. Hazlewood see how pleased she was at the exchange which her daughter seemed to have made.

Meanwhile Lionel Denison, carrying the exhausted and half-famished child in his arms, walked on in the direction of his own house.

Had he not been in such a condition of indignation against Edith Grey, he would probably have thought twice before exhibiting himself with such a burden in his arms, upon a road where he was pretty sure to meet people who knew him; but, as it was, he never thought of the strange appearance he might present, and when he reached the Hermitage he frightened his housekeeper half out of his wits by marching straight into her room, and saying abruptly, as he placed the burden in her arms,—

"Here, Mrs. Curtis, I have brought something for you to take care of."

"Why, it's a child, sir!" exclaimed the worthy woman, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Of course it is," replied her master, with a grim smile.

"And it's alive!" continued the woman, her wonder increasing.

"Yes, I suppose it is alive, but it is famished and most uncomfortably dirty. Give it some food and wash it, and see if you can make or borrow some clean clothes for it, and in the morning bring the little creature to me."

Mrs. Curtis looked at the sleeping child, then at her master, as she asked, doubtfully,—

"Do you know who she belongs to, sir?"

"No; I found her by the side of a dead woman, but this will be her home until somebody

claims her. However, I can't stay to talk now! I must go and give information to the police."

Then he went out of the room, leaving the housekeeper to obey his orders, and to wonder what had come over her master.

Before she had recovered from her surprise her husband came into the room brimful of news and exultation, as he said,—

"I say, Peggy, something's up between the master and Miss Grey. It's an ill-wind that blows nobody good, and you may take my word for it we shan't have to turn out of this place, after all, through her."

"Why, what makes you think so?" asked his wife.

"I met her just now hanging on the arm of Mr. Hazlewood of Starcroft, and looking up into his eyes as we've seen her look at master—the deceitful jade—and as I passed by the study window, this minute, I saw the master with his hat on, sit down by the table, and bury his head in his hands just as if he was heartbroken; and putting two and two together, Peggy, I believe we've got a new lease of a very good birth, old woman. Why, by all that's wonderful, what's you got there?"

It was the child that had, for the first time, attracted his attention.

In the dim twilight he had not observed the little creature as it lay in his wife's lap, but his voice had roused it from sleep, and it now began to cry lustily.

Remembering her master's order, Mrs. Curtis sent her husband for some milk while she gave the famished child a sweet biscuit, and the little creature was soon eating and drinking ravenously.

To wash the poor little thing was the next step, and the worthy housekeeper's womanly heart went out in tenderness to the tiny wail when she found how the baby limbs were fretted and sore with neglect.

But a surprise awaited her, for though the child's frock and outer garments were of the cheapest and commonest description, her linen was of very fine cambric, and her little bodice and petticoat were of the finest Saxony flannel, beautifully embroidered with white silk, though everything was shockingly discoloured with dust and dirt.

"This isn't the child of poor people," thought Mrs. Curtis, as she examined these things, "and I'll take care of the clothes, for they may be useful one day. I wonder if master does really mean to keep her here! I hope he does; there's nothing I'd like better than to take care of the dear little pet. Poor child, though she hasn't lived long in the world she has had a hard time of it!"

Then she put the little one to bed, though not without a lingering suspicion in her mind that her master must know something more about the infant's parentage than he had told her.

This suspicion was not confirmed by his subsequent conduct, for he hardly looked at her the next morning; and afterwards, beyond inquiring occasionally if the child was well and likely to thrive, he evinced no desire to see her again, and showed no curious interest in her welfare.

Indeed, he seemed to have forgotten that the tiny girl was in the house. He shut himself up a good deal in his study, or went out for long solitary walks and rides, and at last he gave up a struggle which he seemed to have been maintaining with himself, and left home.

Before he went away, the woman by whose dead body the child was found was buried at the expense of the parish, the guardians offering no objection to Mr. Denison taking charge of the infant instead of throwing the expense of her maintenance upon the heavily-burdened rate-payers.

In point of fact, they would have had no objection to his paying the expenses of the funeral had he been so inclined, but for many reasons he did not do this.

Rumour had already whispered many disagreeable surmises about his connection with the dead woman and the living child, so that Edith Grey not only received a great deal of sympathy but was considered to be perfectly justified in breaking off her engagement with him.

When he had been absent from home a couple

of weeks he returned unexpectedly, and astonished Mr. and Mrs. Curtis by announcing that he was going out to China, and should leave the Hermitage in their charge.

"And the little girl?" the woman was about to ask, but remembering some of the stories she had heard whispered about, she thought her master might have made some arrangement for the little creature which he did not mean to communicate to her, so she discreetly held her peace.

A couple of hours later, however, Lionel Denison, sitting in his garden and meditatively smoking a cigar, was startled by a little dot of a girl toddling to his side, and saying, with childish confidence,—

"Elise wants sweets."

He looked at the child sadly, though not without a certain amount of astonishment at her singular beauty, for the unusually dark eyes were set in a face that, now it was clean, was the perfection of infantile delicacy of colour and beauty of form, while the abundant golden hair, curled and waved with a wild grace that only nature could bestow.

The demand for sweets was repeated before he bethought himself of the small box of bonbons which he sometimes carried in his pocket.

It was out of this box that he had given the child some sweets when he had found her, and he now handed her the box itself.

"Elise give 'em to me!" said the little thing, holding up her childish face for the cream.

He bent and kissed the baby lips, and, strangely enough, the memory of that kiss remained with him long after Edith Grey's beauty was forgotten, and all love for her had died out of his heart.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

FIFTEEN years have passed since Lionel Denison and Edith Grey took their last walk together on the Shirley Hills.

He was between one and two-and-twenty then, and she a little more than eighteen; now they are both on the shady side of thirty, and both are still unmarried.

That she is still Edith Grey is certainly not her own fault, for few women could have tried harder to advantageously change their father's name for that of some other man than she had done.

Failure, however, had dogged her footsteps from first to last, and whenever she seemed most certain of success the greater had been her disappointment. The consequence is, that advancing years and too-long protracted single blessedness has not only increased the natural acidity of her temper, but has given to her features a certain sharpness of expression that makes her look the thing she really is—a snappish, fretful, discontented old maid.

Her first disappointment after Lionel went to China was Mr. Hazlewood, of Starcroft. He paid her marked attentions, and made love to her in the most open and encouraging manner, but he said nothing about matrimony; and when Mrs. Grey asked him at what date he meant to marry her daughter, he told her coolly enough that he had no present intention of marrying anybody.

The indignation of the two ladies knew no bounds, but it did not affect Mr. Hazlewood; and, after a time, another admirer appeared upon the scene, and Edith brought this affair successfully up to an engagement. But nothing came of it.

The gentleman met with some severe reverses, and Miss Grey promptly made the discovery that he and she were unsuited to each other, and had better part before it was too late.

So matters went on. One eligible bachelor after another was caught, and several widowers had the most hairbreadth escapes, but all alike succeeded in slipping through her fingers before she was able to tie the knot there is no untying; and now we find her at three-and-thirty as eager as ever to change her name and condition, but with her chances of doing so very considerably diminished.

She is in a flutter of excitement this evening, however. Old memories have come back to her. She remembers the lover of her youth, the man with whom she had quarrelled because he would not leave a friendless infant to the tender mercies of the world; and now she tries hard to persuade herself that it is a lingering tenderness for him that has kept her single all these years.

When she ventures to hint this sweet consolation to her mother that practical old lady laughs in her face, and observes, with a sneer,—

"Persuade Lionel to believe that story when he comes back if you can, my dear; but you had better tell it to him before he sees that lovely girl over whom as a child you and he fell out, or I for one shall not blame him if he makes the same choice now as he did then."

"Lionel will look for more than a pretty doll in a wife," retorted Edith; "and if he has been true to me all these years he is not likely to be lured away now by that baby face."

"But how can you suppose the man has ever given you a thought since he went away?" asked the mother, who in these later years had become very critical, and was not always as forbearing as of old. "He has not written to you once."

"No, but he has remained unmarried, which is much more to the purpose," replied Edith, with something like triumph in her voice.

Then turning to a glass she looked at her own face, and after a time she said, with a sigh,—

"I wonder if he will find me very much changed!"

"Changed!" echoed the mother, disdainfully, "so changed that he won't know you if he meets you as a stranger. Changed, indeed! You are no more like you were at eighteen than I am, and if Lionel Denison remembers you at all it will be as he last saw you. But he isn't coming home to marry you, my dear; so don't prepare disappointment for yourself by thinking he is. He hasn't had that little beggar child educated like a lady for nothing."

"But he is old enough to be her father," protested Edith.

"What has that to do with it?" returned her mother. "He is a young man still, and is probably far better looking than when he left England. No, there is not a chance for you, Edith, unless you can get Elise out of the way before he sees her."

Edith Grey tossed her head disdainfully as her mother spoke, but for all that the suggestion sank into her heart, and she began to ponder over the possibility of getting rid of Elise until her own hold upon Lionel should be firmly established.

This was the more difficult to accomplish, because she had never been friendly with the *protégé* of Lionel Denison, but had looked upon her with the same feeling of aversion that she had felt when first she beheld her—ragged, unkempt, and unwashed amongst the heather on the Shirley Hills.

Not that she or anyone in the neighbourhood had seen much of the beautiful girl since that August evening long ago; for one morning about a year after Lionel Denison had gone to China, his housekeeper received instructions to send the child in her care to a certain school in the north of England, where arrangements had been made for her reception, and he likewise intimated that he wished as few words as possible said to the little girl about her unknown parentage or the person who now supported her.

Mrs. Curtis read this letter to her husband, and remarked, significantly,—

"A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse. I always thought there was something strange about the pretty dear. I shall be sorry to lose her, but it's for her good, and the master means to bring her up like a lady."

Then the good woman shed a few tears, and set to work to obey her master's orders.

But she did not send the child to the distant school; she took her there herself, and, in handing her over to the lady who presided over the establishment, she spoke of the little girl as Miss Elise, and gave the impression, without actually saying anything to warrant it, that the youth-

ful pupil was in some way related to Lionel Denison.

The effect of a word or a look will often influence a child's destiny, and good Mrs. Curtis, by her tone and manner, and by the deference with which she submitted to the childish whims of her little charge, certainly made the school-mistress believe that the pretty, strange-looking creature was born to fill a good position in life.

So while Miss Edie was petted and allowed to have her own way to a very considerable extent, she was always beautifully dressed; and, as she grew older, she had the advantage of studying under the best masters that could be obtained, and all the accomplishments which are considered necessary for the education of a gentlewoman were taught her as a matter of course.

It is true that the half-yearly bills that reached Lionel Denison were heavy, and had he been in England he might have grumbled over some of the items, but at such a distance from home this scarcely seemed worth while; and, moreover, he felt that he knew so little about the average cost of a girl's dress and board and education, that to complain would only be to expose his ignorance upon the subject without much chance of altering the condition of affairs.

Mrs. Curtis, having brought the child to her new home, soon took leave of her, but the parting was to both a very bitter one.

The housekeeper went away with tears in her eyes, as though she had left behind her something belonging to herself; while the little one wept passionately, and for two days and nights refused to be comforted.

Happily the griefs of childhood are never very lasting, and poor Edie gradually ceased to pine for the dear, kind face, which was the only one she could distinctly remember as having looked upon her with eyes of love.

For the next ten years Edie was kept at the same school, and the only interruption in the monotony of her life was when Mrs. Curtis came to see her once a year.

When she was about twelve years of age, Edie paid a visit to the Hermitage for a few weeks, while arrangements were being made for her to go to a school in France. But during this brief holiday the girl made no acquaintances.

Mrs. Curtis clung to her like her own shadow. Nobody called at the Hermitage; few people seemed to take any notice of the girl, and still fewer remembered anything about her infancy, so that not a hint concerning the manner in which Lionel Denison had found her was breathed in her ears.

On this occasion she met in her walks a lady who was no longer in her first youth, though the fanciful girl expressed her opinion to Mrs. Curtis that she must have once been pretty. She also called the housekeeper's attention to the fact that this lady always frowned angrily at her when they met, and that she seemed to regard her with positive dislike. But Mrs. Curtis never volunteered any remark, and at last Edie asked her point-blank who the lady was, and why she looked at her as she did.

The answer was that it was a Miss Grey, but beyond that Edie obtained no satisfactory information, for the worthy housekeeper declined to say any more than that Miss Grey was a crabbed old maid, and particularly warned Edie against speaking to her.

"She is like the wicked fairy in the story-books, my dear," said the old woman, vaguely; "and the less you ever have to do with her the better."

This warning, however, only gave Miss Grey an additional interest in the eyes of the imaginative girl, and more than once she had half paused, as though with the intention of addressing her. But Edie had on each occasion turned away disdainingly; and, as Edie's holidays were not of very long duration, the danger which Mrs. Curtis dreaded was averted.

Things were changed now, however; Edie had left school for good, and Lionel Denison, who had been absent from England for fifteen years, was coming home at last.

It is not to be supposed that Edie had never asked any questions about her own parentage, for, in point of fact, she had tormented every-

body with whom she came in contact upon the subject, and especially curious had she been to ascertain what relation her guardian, as Lionel termed himself, was to her.

No one could or would enlighten her, however, and she wove in her busy little brain many romances of which she herself was the heroine, and all of them were naturally based upon the presumption that her actual condition was what it seemed to be—that she was the daughter of a gentleman, was undoubtedly an heiress, and would one day marry a man who would be infinitely superior to all the rest of his sex.

Edie was very excited at the thought that her guardian will soon be back in his old home, and she wonders what he is like and whether he will be kind to her, and she tries in vain to remember him.

She has always pictured him to herself as an old man, and in her last letter—the last that he could receive before she would see him—she had asked him to send her his portrait, so that she might recognise him on his return, while she sent her own, that he might recognise her.

A long time elapsed before an answer came to her request, and one summer evening Edie went down to the shrubbery gate to look out for the postman, because she knew the China mail was in. She was not disappointed, for he brought with him and handed to her the long-expected missive.

The grounds of the Hermitage were large and secluded, so instead of returning to the house Edie turned into the shrubbery, and seating herself on a garden-chair, proceeded to open her letter.

There was a carte-de-visite inside the envelope, and girl-like she hastened to look at it before reading what the original of the portrait had written.

A strange sensation thrilled her heart as, with eager eyes and half-parted lips, she gazed on the likeness of the fine form and handsome face that could only belong to a man who is very much on the sunny side of forty.

"And I thought he was old," she mused aloud; "old enough to be my father, or even my grandfather, while, in fact, he is young enough to be my—"

She did not finish the sentence, for a voice close to her ear hissed,—

"Your husband, I suppose you think?"

With a wild cry of alarm Edie sprang to her feet, and stood face to face with the woman who for so long a time had been such a mystery to her.

"Who are you?" she asked, angrily, "How dare you intrude upon me like this?"

"Intrude upon you!" snarled Edith Grey, with bitter laugh. "You are a mighty important personage to be intruded upon, certainly. I suppose you think that people have forgotten under what circumstances Lionel Denison found you?"

"Found me!" echoed the girl, passing her hand across her brow, the better to clear her brain and realise the meaning of the words that fell upon her ears.

But Edie paid no heed to her exclamation; all the pent-up spite and animosity which had been accumulating in her heart against the girl whom she had made the ostensible excuse for her rupture with Lionel Denison, now burst forth in such a torrent of contempt, accusation, and invective that she at whom the burning words were hurled stood mute with amazement, not unmixed with terror.

At length Edith Grey paused, not so much from having nothing more to say as from sheer exhaustion; and Edie, clutching the top of the garden seat for support with one hand while she pressed the other on her throbbing heart, found her voice at last, and said, painfully,

"What you tell me cannot be true. If I had been found by the side of a dead beggar-woman when I was a very little girl I must have heard something about it, and I should not have been brought up as if I were Mr. Denison's daughter. No; the more I think of it the more I am convinced that you have invented this cruel story, because for some reason which I cannot understand you hate me."

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"Hate you!" echoed Edith, her eyes blazing with the fury into which she had worked herself. "Have I not good cause to hate you? But for you Lionel Denison would never have been an exile in a foreign land during all the best years of his life, but would have been living here in his own house with me, whom he loved, as his wife. Is it to be wondered at that I hate the serpent that has blighted his life and mine?"

There was such a world of rancor in the words, and in the voice of the faded beauty, and she looked so spiteful and so worn by time and disappointment, that Edie, gazing at her, said, without thinking of the sting she might inflict, —

"But you must be much older than my guardian. He is young and handsome" — and she glanced at the portrait she held in her hand — "while you are —" She paused, natural delicacy making her hesitate to wound the feelings of a woman who had shown such an utter want of consideration for her.

"What am I?" was the savagely uttered demand.

"You — you — are almost old," replied Edie.

The faded woman gasped, but she had wasted her strength beforehand, and could now only answer feebly, —

"At any rate, I am three years younger than Mr. Denison, and I very much doubt if he doesn't look older than he seems in that photograph. Here, let me look at it."

But Edie quickly thrust the unread letter and the *carte de visite* into her pocket, as she said, —

"It was not intended for you. If my guardian had wished you to have his portrait he would, no doubt, have sent it to you; and as for your assertion that I prevented him from marrying you, I simply do not believe it."

"It was not that he would not marry me, but that I would not marry him unless he sent you away from his house," replied Edith. "In a moment of anger he refused, and I would not listen to him afterwards, and he went away almost broken-hearted, but he has been true to me, and he may still be happy if you do not wreck the dearest hopes of his life a second time."

"I don't know what influence I can have upon his hopes or happiness," replied Edie, sadly. "If I am no more to him than you say I am, I am sure he will not consider my feelings on the subject if he wishes to marry you."

"But you don't suppose that I would marry him with you living in his house, do you?" demanded Miss Grey, with a sneer. "If I refused to do so when you were a child I should certainly not tolerate your presence now."

"I don't think you are likely to be asked to do so," was the courteous, though somewhat ambiguous reply, as, with a slight inclination of the head, Edie turned and walked towards the house, leaving the elder woman to look after her with eyes full of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.

But though the girl behaved bravely and calmly enough in the presence of her enemy, she was, in truth, stung to the very heart.

Here was an intensely proud and sensitive nature, and until this hour she had never doubted for a moment that she was well born, and when at school she had, it must be confessed, looked with much condescension and some pity upon girls of plebeian origin. But now she was told that she herself came not even from a respectable if humble stock, but that she was the offspring of the very lowest of the low — that she had been picked up out of pity, and had ever since been simply a recipient of charity.

"If it is so, it was cruel of him to let me grow up in ignorance of my true condition," she thought, resentfully, as she sought the seclusion of her own room, and read the letter which her self-appointed guardian had sent her.

There was not much in the epistle. The writer of it said he hoped she had been a good and industrious girl while at school, since it was very probable that she would have to turn her education to some practical account.

At any other time this suggestion would have surprised and annoyed her, but coming now as it did after Edith Grey's assertions, it seemed but a confirmation of the spiteful woman's story.

"I will ask Mrs. Curtis if it is true that he found me by the side of a dead woman on the Shirley Hills," she decided, as she folded up the letter and returned it, with the photograph, to her pocket. "If it is true," she went on, "and if I find that he and that dreadful woman were engaged to be married at that time, and that he is coming back now to make her his wife, they may both be sure that I shall not interfere with their comfort. I would take a situation as a kitchenmaid sooner than live for a single day under the same roof with her!"

She looked more fit to be a young duchess than a kitchenmaid as she said this, but she was terribly in earnest. Nothing should ever induce her to remain a burden upon the man who had hitherto acted the part of a father to her; and as for being an obstacle in any way to his happiness she would rather die a dozen deaths.

And that night, by dint of much cross-questioning, she extracted from Mrs. Curtis the story of how she was first brought to the Hermitage, and how Lionel Denison's engagement with Miss Grey was broken off in consequence.

"That's why she always looks at you so spitefully, my dear," continued the old woman, soothingly, "but she has only herself to blame for the master going away as he did; it wasn't your fault."

"No, it was not my fault," echoed Edie.

But when she found herself again alone the agonizing thought that filled her heart would find expression in words.

"The woman's story was true," she groaned. "I was but a little outcast when he picked me up and fed and sheltered me, and it seems, too, that I was the innocent cause of his great unhappiness. But this shall not happen again. I will go away from this place before he returns, and then he and that woman who hates me will neither of them find me in their way."

She shed some very bitter tears as she made this resolution, and the sobs which she tried to suppress almost choked her; for all the bright dreams of her girlhood were shattered, and she

was about to throw herself upon the cold, pitiless world, knowing as little how to steer her course as does a flower cast upon the surface of a swiftly-flowing river.

(To be continued.)

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SOCIETY.

THE military household of the Tsar is composed of ninety-eight officers of various ranks, eighty-two of whom belong to the Army, and fifteen to the Navy. Nineteen members of the Royal Family are included in the list.

THE Duke and Duchess and the Princesses of Connaught are at Bagshot Park, which place will be their headquarters until after the Emperor's William's visit to England, when they are probably going to Italy for a few months.

THE Duke of Coburg will probably come to England at the end of the month for about three weeks, most of the time being spent at Clarence House; and he will pay visits to the Queen at Windsor Castle, and to the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham.

THE Duke and Duchess of Fife have now for several years past made Brighton their headquarters during the winter, and, although they pay occasional visits to London and elsewhere, their children remain by the sea throughout the winter. This winter the Duke and Duchess will once more reside at Brighton.

It is said in Austrian Court circles that Crown Princess Stephanie contemplates marrying again. The object of her Imperial Highness's choice is said to be a young Hungarian nobleman. To marry him she would, it is stated, lay aside her rank and position, as well as the guardianship of her only child, the Archduchess Elizabeth, who has just entered on her seventeenth year, and who is a prime favourite with her grandfather the Emperor.

THE Emperor William will not visit Sandringham during his stay in England, which is to extend over nine days. The Emperor is to be the guest of the Queen at Windsor Castle from Monday, November 20th, until Saturday, the 25th, when he goes into Westmoreland on a visit to Lord Lonsdale, at Lowther Castle. There is to be a great batta in Lord Lonsdale's park on Monday, the 27th, and the Emperor will leave Lowther on Tuesday, the 28th, to rejoin his yacht, either at Leith or at Newcastle-on-Tyne.

IT is difficult to realise that Princess Margaret of Connaught is of marriageable age, yet the question of her betrothal has more than once been discussed of late, and it is rumoured that it may not be impossible that this gentle little Princess may one day occupy a great position. The Tsarevitch, it is said, would prefer to marry an English Princess, and the only one who would be of suitable age would be Princess Margaret of Connaught, who promises to be one of the sweetest, and at the same time most tactful, of the Queen's descendants.

FROM her earliest childhood the Queen of Italy has had a passion for books, and early set herself to master the different languages in which the best of them are written. She studied English in order to make Shakespeare's acquaintance, and to this day he remains her favourite author, followed closely by Ruskin and Darwin. Among German writers she loves Goethe best; among French, Racine and Chateaubriand. She knows Spanish well, and Latin and Greek are familiar tongues. Add to this a wide range of "ologies," of which she has a practical knowledge, and the Queen Margaret's title to the reputation of being the most learned of queens is obvious.

ON all great occasions the Emperor William of Germany wears a queer old ring, which is a tall-mans of his family, and for which he has the greatest respect. Its history dates from the time of the Elector John Cicerio, who flourished towards the close of the fifteenth century. Since that time each ruler has, if possible, handed to his successor a sealed packet just before his death. The packet contains a ring, in which is set a black stone, which, it is said, was dropped by a toad on the coverlet of a princess of the family immediately after she had given birth to a son. Frederick the Great found the ring in an envelope, together with a memorandum written by Frederick I, telling its value and the mode of transmission.

STATISTICS.

THE average life of Londoners is 57 years. The number of Buddhists is computed to be 455,000,000.

THE population of Jerusalem is 45,000. Of these 28,000 are Hebrews.

It is ascertained, on scientific data, that the air resistance to a railway-train of average weight moving sixty miles an hour is 11,374 lbs.—nearly six tons.

GEMS.

THE great charm of all power is modesty. Life is made up, not of great sacrifices or duties, but of little things, in which smiles and kindness, and small obligations given habitually, are what preserve the heart and secure comfort.

THE standard of worth is not a gold standard. One of the most insidious tendencies of the times is the tendency to make wealth the measure of one's position in the world. Not what we have, and not what our fathers had and did, but what we are and what we do is the true test of our merit and greatness.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

STEWED FILLET OF BEEF.—Ingredients: Half a pound fillet of beef, three mushrooms, two tea-spoonfuls shallot or onion, half a pint stock or water, half an ounce glace, sprig parsley, thyme, and marjoram, half an ounce butter, one ounce flour, salt and pepper. Wipe the meat; trim off all fat; cut the lean into large square pieces. Peel and chop the shallot, and examine and peel the mushrooms. Tie the herbs together with fine string or cotton.

VENICE FETTERS.—Ingredients: Three ounces whole rice, two ounces fine sugar, three ounces currants, four ounces finely chopped apple, a tea-spoonful flour, three eggs, one ounce butter, a pinch of salt, and the grated rind of a small lemon. Boil the rice in milk till tender and dry, add the sugar, butter, salt and lemon. When cool, mix with it the currants, the apples finely chopped, the flour, and the eggs well-beaten. Drop the mixture in small filters, fry them in butter, when firm on one side turn to the other, fry about eight minutes, drain them, and serve with sifted sugar over.

FACETIES.

MAUD: "I firmly believe that we should love our enemies." Jock: "In that case I declare war upon you at once."

"JOHNNIE, you talk too much." "See here, dad, am I to blame for your marrying into a talkative family?"

"Do you think this poem of mine will live?" asked the high-browed youth. "I dunno," answered the brutal acquaintance; "it ought to. It seems pretty tough."

SCRIBUS (excitedly): "The edition of my book is exhausted!" Castleton: "It's a great mistake, old man." Scribus: "What is?" Castleton: "To be so generous!"

"WELL, doctor, what do you think about the swelling at the back of my neck?" "I don't like the look of it, as it is in a very dangerous place. My advice to you is to keep your eye on it!"

THE BRIDE: "I want to thank you so much for that beautiful present." Her Married Friend: "Say no more, my dear; it was a trifle." The Bride: "I didn't think so when I gave it to you at your marriage."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

GIPSY.—Under the circumstances you are responsible. L. G. D.—The Admiralty Office is at Whitehall, London.

DICK WHITTINGTON.—Lord Mayor's Day is the 9th of November.

POPPIN.—The Sahara Desert is three times as large as the Mediterranean.

HALVES.—If a person dies intestate leaving two daughters, they share equally.

DECEIVER.—It would be well for the second woman he married to consult a good lawyer without delay.

CLAIMANT.—Without papers it is impossible for you either to make a claim or obtain payment of a pension.

IN TROUBLE.—You had better call on a local clergyman, who, we doubt not, would give you every assistance you want.

LAWLESS.—Vaccination is still compulsory unless a certificate of exemption is given by the magistrates under the recent Act.

CLIMAX.—The fact that a man had not seen or heard of his wife for six years would not be sufficient to prevent conviction for bigamy.

DICKY BIRD.—Cleaning windows with borax, instead of ammonia or soap, takes much less time than the ordinary way, and is a success.

A LULLABY.

Son or sweet, birdkin,
In the nest, mother's breast,
Silk-soft for birdkin,
With wind in the east.
Hush, Oh, birdkin,
Sleep away another day,
Much too cold for birdkin
In east-wind day.

Sleep soft, leafkin,
Softly curl not unfurled,
Silk smooth for leafkin
Of pink and pearl.
Hush, Oh, leafkin,
Not uncise, baby rose,
Much too harsh for leafkin
East wind blows.

Creep close, lambkin;
Nestie, hide by mother's side
Till up-pring, for lambkin,
Dainties pied.
Hush, Oh, lambkin,
Safe in fold from the cold
Till south wind for lambkin
Has wings unfold.

Hush, Oh! babykin,
Mother's joy, father's boy,
Pearl of price is babykin
And winds are keen.
Dream, sweet babykin,
Golden head in rosy bed,
Over sleepy babykin,
Angels, lean!

BAK.—The Transvaal is not an "independent Sovereign State," but received its independence under the Convention agreed to in 1881.

SYMPATHISER.—The first trial of Dreyfus by a criminal tribunal was in the Criminal Division of the Court of Cassation. The second was by the entire Court.

LADYBIRD.—A skewer used under the edges of carpets, and a slightly damped cloth or sponge, will save much dust and labour if occasionally used in place of the broom.

A. M. G.—A cheque must be cashed during the lifetime of the drawer, otherwise it is void. If it was for a debt owing by the deceased you can claim on his executors.

BENEDICT.—The young man may marry in the same name in which he has been brought up and by which he is commonly known; but he would do well to describe himself for registration also by his parental name.

WRINKLES.—Wrinkles round the eyes and forehead may usually be removed by the systematic use of some good cream, with face massage. The progress of disappearance is gradual, but if the treatment is persevered with, it is generally effective.

ANNIE'S LOVE.—What is known as North America is Canada; America simply is the name given to the United States; South America covers about half-a-dozen Republics. Write Enquiry Information Office, 51 Broadway, London, S. W., for latest trade reports from colonies.

DISAPPOINTED.—You have worked yourself into a morbid condition of mind, and the sooner you get rid of it the better for yourself and everyone connected with you. Be patient and wait your turn. As for getting married, the more you think about it and regret the want of a sweetheart, the more you will decrease your chances by diminishing your attractiveness.

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CORAL.—An oil stain on marble may be removed by making a mixture of one-and-a-half parts of soft soap, one-and-a-half parts of potash, and three parts of Fuller's earth. Mix with boiling water, and apply to the spot, letting it remain three hours or so, and then wash off with soap and water.

POURRAGE.—A pack of rose leaves, gathered perfectly dry, strew over half pound salt, and let them remain two or three days; then mix half-pound bay salt, some lily leaves or lavender, one ounce cloves, one nutmeg, grated, two or three bay leaves; some fresh rose leaves may be added from time to time, but more salt will be needed.

PICTURE.—Your best plan is to state frankly to your present lover the state of your feelings. It is a little humiliating, no doubt, but it is the only "honest and true" course. You should have thought of the old adage:

"Tis well to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new."

H. G.—To two gallons water add two ounces bruised ginger and two pounds of sugar. Boil half an hour skin, and pour into a jar or tub with sliced lemon and half ounce cream of tartar. When nearly cold add a cupful of yeast. Let it work for two days, then strain, bottle, and cork. A preference is given to stone bottles.

RED ROSE.—We do not know what its causes may be in your case, but we think that it is probably indigestion or bad circulation—perhaps both. In any case, you will do well to be careful to eat simple, wholesome food; not to overload the digestive organs; to take plenty of outdoor exercise, and to avoid all tight clothing, especially tight corsets.

SILVER THREADS.—It is impossible to say the cause of grey hairs; often they are brought on by the use of strong metallic medicines; sometimes violent emotion produces them; but when they appear in comparative youth there is always the hope that vigour will reassert itself and restore the lost colour to the hair.

LASSIE.—The information required by the registrar when arrangements are being made for publication of names preliminary to marriage is the names, ages, occupations, and residences of bride and bridegroom, also names and residences of parents if known or alive; if unknown, the registrar must rest content with being told that.

LOVEMORE.—You must call your pride and self-respect to your assistance and determine to crush any warm affection you happen to feel for him, and until that is accomplished, we should advise you to keep out of his way as much as possible. We do not doubt that you will soon learn to forget him and laugh at yourself for having once imagined you were in love with him.

CONSTANT READER.—The way to get rid of warts is to rub them with lunar caustic daily, scraping off the cinder in the morning produced by the application of the previous night; the caustic (two penny-worth) may be got from any chemist; some caution is necessary, however; if the excrescences are really moles, not warts, they had better not be interfered with lest a skin disease be set up; the wart has always a rough top; the mole does not seem to come quite through the skin.

CONSTANT READER.—To preserve the colours in flowers, mosses, &c., for mounting, it is necessary they should be pressed immediately they are gathered. Place the specimens between two sheets of blotting paper, and put these between two boards, with as level surfaces as it is possible to obtain, on the top of which stand heavy weights, and let them remain there until the whole of the moisture is squeezed out of the plants; then mount them. They must be kept in a place that is perfectly dry, or else they will soon fade.

Curious.—Rats often desert a house before it falls down, because the settling of the beams, bricks, and stones causes noises that, inaudible to human beings, are perfectly so, and also very alarming to the rodents. Rats have been known to desert mines shortly before earthquakes or subaudiences occurred, probably for the same reason.

F. M.—Wheat is grown all over the world, in the southern as well as in the northern hemisphere, and as the winter in half of the world occurs when the other half has its summer, the Chinese and Australians are sowing and reaping wheat while the northern hemisphere is wrapped in snow. In so many countries is wheat grown, and under such diverse conditions, that there is no month in the year during which wheat-sowing or a wheat harvest is not going on in some part of the world.

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